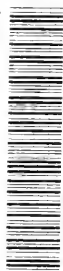


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THE  
STORY OF SIBYLLE.

BY

OCTAVE FEUILLET,

AUTHOR OF "THE ROMANCE OF A POOR YOUNG MAN."

*TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH*

BY M. H. T.



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# THE STORY OF SIBYLLE.

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## PART I.

### I.

#### THE FERIAS.

A BEAUTIFUL day in the month of August was drawing to its close. From the bells of the small, but solidly built church of Férias, which stands on the summit of a steep cliff, on the eastern coast of the Norman peninsula, rang out a peal of merry sound. From the open doors a number of peasants, dressed in their Sunday costumes, were making their way into the churchyard. They appeared to hail with great satisfaction the sight of a Norman nurse in sumptuous apparel, who had just presented herself on the threshold of the church porch, soothing to sleep behind the wide wings of her coif a child enveloped in rich baptismal robes. The crowd opened a passage for this important personage, who, from time to time, condescended to suspend her triumphal march and to raise the veil which covered the child, so as to afford an occasional glimpse of her precious charge to the group of interested matrons that surrounded her. The nurse was followed by two domes-

tics in black livery, carrying two heavy wallets, which attracted the exclusive attention of the less sentimental portion of the public. Afterwards, the curé, still wearing his stole, came out of the church, and with an air of business said something to the domestics, who quickly went forward, the crowd hastily following. In a few moments the curé, a stout, middle-aged man, whose features bore the impress of an honest simplicity, was left alone in the little churchyard; and from a distance could be heard, mingled with the sound of the waves dashing against the shore, the cries of the children on the borders of the heath, scrambling for their share of the customary bounty. At the same time the church-bells ceased to ring out their joyous chimes, and the simple edifice resumed, in the solitude, the character of rigidity and melancholy which the ocean seems to cast back upon all that it approaches. Behind the thick woods which skirt the horizon on the side of the land, following the undulations of the hills in a parallel line with the shore, the sun was sinking in his glory,

piercing with thousands of golden arrows the dense masses of the foliage; his slanting rays still rested on the summit of the cliff and lit up the glittering panes of the church windows, but they no longer reached the sea, the azure tint of which was rapidly assuming a more sombre hue.

At this moment the door of the church again opened, and an old gentleman and old lady, both tall of stature and with an air of distinction and quiet dignity, slowly descended the steps of the church porch, and advanced towards two slabs of white marble joined together on two graves close to each other, where they kneeled down, side by side. The curé also kneeled down a few steps behind them. After a few moments the old gentleman arose, and touching the shoulder of the lady, who was praying with her face concealed by her hands, "Come, Louise," said he, gently.

She immediately arose and looking at him, her eyes filled with tears, smiled upon him. He drew her towards him, and touched with his lips her pure and pale forehead. The curé approached.

"My Lord Marquis," said he, with a sort of hesitating timidity, "He who gave has taken away: shall we not say, 'blessed be his name'?"

The old man sighed, fixed his eye for a moment upon the sea, then upon the sky, and, taking off his hat, answered, "Yes, sir; 'blessed be his name.'"

He then took the arm of the lady, and they left the graveyard together.

Half an hour later, as night was closing in, a carriage, rolling almost noiselessly over the damp ground of a long, gloomy avenue, brought back to the castle of Férias all now left of the ancient family of this name, the two grandparents, whom we have seen bending over two graves, and the blue-eyed orphan child, who had just received in baptism the name of Sibylle Anne, handed down in the family for many generations.

It was now a little more than a year since the Marquis and Marchioness of Férias had lost successively, within an interval of a few days, their daughter-in-law, Julie de Vergnes, an angelic creature, who had lived with them only long enough to make herself adored and wept over, and their only son, Christian, Count of Férias, a young man of a grave, sweet, and tender nature, altogether crushed by the terrible blow which had befallen him. In these days of weak faith and unhealthy sensibility, many, struck down by misfortunes such as these, would lose courage and give way to despair. Not so the Marquis and Marchioness of Férias; for although both of a nature in which tenderness almost reached the point of weakness, and although they felt to its fullest extent the agony of their irreparable loss, still they were sustained by religious faith, by the support of their mutual affection, and, lastly, by the sentiment of the duty which remained to them to fulfil towards the infant child, almost the offspring of the tomb.

## II.

## THE BEAUMESNIL FAMILY.

A COUNTRY neighbor, called Mme. de Beaumesnil, had found, in the catastrophe which had overwhelmed the house of Férias, a fortunate opportunity for exercising the talents she believed herself to possess for playing the part of consoler, and for pouring out the treasures of charity nature had laid up in her heart. For a person filled, like this lady, with a spirit of devotion to others, a birth and two deaths succeeding each other in so short a period as a fortnight were circumstances of rich and rare interest. Shortly after the young Countess was taken ill, this provident matron hastened to the castle of Férias, with her pockets filled with various remedies and elixirs. Entirely in her element, she had, during this fatal fortnight, never ceased advising and consoling, chattering and fluttering about like a sea-gull in a storm. Such demonstrations on the part of a stranger formed a singular contrast with the calm demeanor of the two old people, upon whom fell the weight of these terrible calamities, and who, withdrawing as much as possible from the gaze of others, hid their grief, with the sensitive reserve of high-toned natures. This position had highly disgusted Mme. de Beaumesnil. Shortly after her return to her own house, towards the close of one of those rich and heavy repasts not uncommon in the country, she gave out her opinions on this

subject to her guests in the somewhat inelegant style habitual to her.

"Decidedly," said she, "these Férias have no heart. I always suspected it was so; now I am sure of it. They are made up of pride! Really, if I had not been there, it would have been but dry mourning, as one may say; and, indeed, for all the thanks I received, I might as well have spared my handkerchiefs and my poor eyes; but either one has a heart, or one has not. Besides, what I did was for the love of God, who sees and knows all things, does he not, abbé? Do drink something, my dear abbé. Come, curé, you must drink a glass of my home-made wine. You cannot refuse me that. It is true, my poor friend, I cannot offer you such wine as they have in the cellars at Férias. But what we have we give with a welcome. That is something. Come, another glass. See, it is poured out, you must take it. You need something to keep you up. I saw how you were overcome at the two ceremonies. Your tears fell like dew upon the altar. *Apropos* of that, your altar-cloth is coming on finely, and, indeed, it would have been finished by this time, if it had not been for these interruptions. But we must keep up, you see. Life is only a vale of tears, you know. Besides, why should we be in greater grief than the Férias, who really have astonished me. And then, Providence knows what is best. That poor Julie certainly had some accomplishments, but she was a conceited little Parisian,

who, if she had lived, might not, perhaps, always have given such satisfaction to her fine relatives, particularly with a husband like Christian, who could not hold his own with a woman, notwithstanding all his fine airs. He was a good fellow, — I do not deny it, — but proud as a peacock, a true *Féris* from his head to his heels; and, as the blessed Gospel says, ‘The haughty shall be brought low.’”

Here *Mme. de Beaumesnil* modestly wiped her lips, upon which the good home-made wine had left some traces.

Notwithstanding all this miserable gossip, *Mme. de Beaumesnil* was not altogether a fool. A kind of vulgar cunning, often the accompaniment of a narrow mind, and of ignoble sentiments in her, was combined with a tenacity of will which made her a good woman of business. She was the daughter of a small country squire, with a large family of children, and appeared destined, as she herself would have expressed it, to dress the hair of *St. Catherine*, patron of the virgin martyrs, when a considerate friend suggested to her an available prey in the person of *Monsieur de Beaumesnil*, who resided in a neighboring canton, a rich man and of good family, but whose want of intellect almost amounted to idiocy. She resolved she would marry this fool, and she succeeded in carrying out her purpose. And, indeed, *M. de Beaumesnil*, who was entirely ignorant of business, did not make a bad bargain when he gave his name to *Mademoiselle Desrozais*. She set

herself energetically to work to relieve his property from some embarrassments, and succeeded in putting his affairs on a good footing, and in keeping them from that time forward in good order. *M. de Beaumesnil* could now safely resign himself to the pleasant state of somnolence which usually occupied the intervals between his repasts; when awake, this eccentric personage appeared to consider life as a perpetual joke, smiling and laughing at everything, with or without cause. Ordinarily, he was as mute as a fish, excepting when he had dreamed, for he had a mania for relating his dreams, which was, in fact, his principal mode of entertaining his guests. *M. and Mme. de Beaumesnil* had no children, and this circumstance was not especially afflicting to humanity in general, but it was a most fortunate one for the relatives of the lady; one of her brothers, *Theodore Desrozais*, who called himself *chevalier*, and made pretensions to nobility, soon set up his household gods at the manor of *Beaumesnil*. He was a man of mature age, with a large nose and small eyes, whose conversation after dinner often brought blushes to the cheeks of the ladies. During the week he was, alternately, the terror and the admiration of the servant-girls of the vicinity, and on Sundays he sang in the choir of the church. Then came a cousin, *Constance Desrozais*, an old maid, fat, smiling, and servile, upon whom *Mme. de Beaumesnil* imposed a large share of the labors of the household; lastly, a

niece, Clotilde Desrozais, whose father had, not long since, been killed in Africa, — a beautiful, dark-complexioned child, passionate, capricious, absurdly indulged, and who already manifested a most decided character.

“You see, *curé*,” remarked Mme. de Beaumesnil to her pastor, whom she frequently made the confidant of her ideas, but from whom, to do the good man justice, she seldom obtained more than a cold and constrained assent, — “you see, it is only spoiled children who turn out well; I have always observed that. What is the use of crossing the poor little creatures? They will have plenty of crosses when they are older, poor things! Besides, it would be a want of confidence towards the good God who watches over them. I know this is not the notion of the *Férias*, and they have made free to insinuate it to me in regard to Clotilde; as much as to say, the dear child might reproach us one day with having spoiled her, when, on the contrary, she feels for M. de Beaumesnil and myself the greatest possible love and respect. Is it not so, my adored Clotilde?”

Mlle. Clotilde, who was now about seven years of age, and who listened to this discourse with her arms crossed, and balancing herself on the top of a chair, made no other answer than to thrust out her tongue from between her little pointed teeth.

“Charming little pet!” continued Mme. de Beaumesnil, not at all disconcerted. “What a frank nature!

As for the *Férias*, we shall see what they will make of their Sibylle, with all their whims about education. And that pagan name they have given her is not any too good an omen. Nothing but their family pride put that into their heads. *Curé*, remember what I tell you; she will turn out an affected minx, like her poor mother.”

It may seem strange that a woman like Mme. de Beaumesnil, surrounded, too, by such relatives, should be admitted, on terms of intimacy, into a household like that of the *Férias*, where nobility of blood, habits of high breeding, and natural good taste combined to form an interior of the most distinguished kind; but one great inconvenience of a country life is, that there one endures rather than chooses their acquaintances. Besides, Mme. de Beaumesnil, who, with all her fault-finding, was extremely proud of her intimacy with the great people of the neighborhood, had sufficient sense to be herself much more circumspect in the presence of the *Férias* family, and to insist upon a similar reserve on the part of her relatives. Besides, she was so obsequious in her attentions that the good old people felt in a manner bound to return her civilities. The toleration natural to kind hearts, and the fatal necessity of a second for billiards and a fourth for whist, — games of which the old Marquis was fond, and in which the chevalier Theodore excelled, — may still further serve to explain the singular fusion of such opposite elements.

## III.

## SIBYLLE.

THE Count and Countess de Vergnes, the maternal grandparents of Sibylle, who lived in Paris in great magnificence, made no opposition to the arrangement proposed to them by the Férias, after the unhappy events which brought such sorrow to both families. Sibylle was to be brought up in the country, and not to take up her residence at the Hôtel de Vergnes until the time should come to give the finishing touches to her education, to introduce her into society, and to think of her establishment in marriage. The Countess de Vergnes, especially, an extremely worldly woman, still young, and who liked to be thought even more so than she really was, accepted eagerly an arrangement which delayed her appearance in the character of a grandmother, by keeping a little longer out of sight the living proof of the fact.

We are obliged to confess that the first few years of the life of Sibylle Anne offer nothing especially worthy of record. The child was pretty; her large blue eyes had usually a sweet and serious expression, but they would assume a deeper hue during those noisy and mysterious fits of rage which a skilful nurse knows how to pacify by her soothing incantations. Sibylle, to tell the truth, was sufficiently addicted to these demonstrations of passion, which are not the greatest attraction of infancy. One summer night,

when she had just been laid in her cradle, in front of a window left open on account of the extreme heat, she began to scream so loudly that the Marquis and Marchioness rushed simultaneously to her room. The nurse had exhausted all her composing resources, and declared she did not understand the case. The Marchioness sang to the child, the Marquis scolded; she still continued to cry and struggle.

"Really, it is almost unbearable," said the Marquis. "Can anything hurt her, nurse?"

"No, my friend," said the Marchioness, "that is not it; she wants something."

"But what can she want, my dear? Try and find it out; for I say again, I can scarcely bear it."

"My friend," said the Marchioness, who, with her superior maternal instinct, had studied the direction of the eyes and hands of the excited child, "I see now what it is; she wants a star."

"My dear, I believe you are right. Yes, it is plain; she wants a star."

"Well, then, sir," said the nurse, "we will light a piece of paper and put it into her hand."

"No, no," said the Marquis, "I will not agree to that; it would be deceiving the child, and, besides, I will not yield to such a caprice. Nurse," added he, in a severe tone, "shut the window."

This masterly expedient was successful; for Sibylle Anne, after a few moments of reflection, made up her



mind to go to sleep, and probably dreamed that she was holding her star in her little clenched hand. When Sibylle was able to express herself by speech as well as gesture, there was no longer any room for doubt that this young person had received from some malicious fairy, forgotten at her birthday fête, the fatal gift of conceiving the most unreasonable fancies, and of requiring the immediate gratification of them with an imperious vehemence which, when any obstacle was interposed to the fulfilment of her wishes, goaded her almost to frenzy.

This unfortunate temper, observed by Mme. de Beaumesnil, afforded her a malicious pleasure, and, as may be imagined, was a source of great sorrow to Mme. de Férias.

"We must allow, my friend," said she, sighing, to her husband, "that there is something of the demon in our angel."

"No, my dear," returned the old Marquis, "I do not allow it. It is true, the child has a strong and passionate will; but so much the better, if that will be rightly directed. I often see you, my dear, admiring the rosy and transparent nails of our little girl; but, you know, without proper care they would soon become only hideous claws. So it is with all the faculties with which Heaven has endowed us; they are double-edged tools, equally fitted for good or ill. The more powerful and determined these faculties are, the richer is the gift; the great point is, properly to regulate and direct them. This

will be Sibylle's own duty towards herself, when she is old enough to comprehend it; until then it is ours. I have always believed that parents, and all others upon whom devolves the sacred task of educating children, are, at least, half responsible for the destinies which are preparing for them. My idea of the justice of God is, that it condescends to look back to the beginnings of our faults, even to their earliest germs, and, with the exactness of supreme equity, to take into account the share of all in the destiny of each. This responsibility, for which we must render account, is doubtless a heavy burden; but, on the other hand, it is sweet to think that our influence on the character and future of our children is not only great for this world, but may even extend to eternity. In regard to Sibylle, without crushing in her the precious instrument of the will, which is a choice faculty and a priceless weapon in the battle of life, I shall use all my efforts to bend it in the direction of the true, the reasonable, and the possible, although I certainly could have wished this painful contest might have been spared me in my old age; for I acknowledge my extreme weakness for this child, and I should be miserable if she were to think her grandfather — now her only father — harsh or unkind; and God knows I am not so."

"God and I!" said the Marchioness, gazing on the face of her husband with a look of infinite tenderness.

The conversation of the good old people was suddenly interrupted by the sound of sharp cries proceeding from the garden, which summoned M. de Férias to the practical application of his theories. He immediately repaired to the scene of action, his heart oppressed by the sense of the cruel duty laid upon him, when he perceived his granddaughter engaged in a furious contest, with feet and hands, against her faithful nurse, who, for two or three years past, had been promoted to the duties of governess. This deplorable scene was taking place on the borders of a pond, upon the waters of which three or four swans were noiselessly displaying their majestic grace. Seeing her grandfather coming, Sibylle stopped crying, and awaited his approach, with flaming eyes and lips compressed, in a most resolute attitude.

"What is the matter, if you please?" said M. de Férias.

"I want to ride upon the swan," said Sibylle, briefly.

"What do you mean? ride upon the swan!" said the Marquis. "What nonsense is this?"

The nurse then explained that the young lady, after distributing bread to the swans very prettily, had suddenly expressed an energetic desire to ride upon one of these birds, and, thus mounted, to make the circle of the pond. "Is it not true, my lord, that she would be drowned?"

"There is no doubt of that," replied the Marquis, "and she deserves to be allowed to try it."

"The swan does not get drowned," said Sibylle.

"The swan has received from God the power of swimming, and you have not."

"I want to ride upon the swan!" repeated Sibylle, trembling with rage.

"You must go to your room," said the Marquis, "since you will not listen to reason. Take her away, nurse."

As Sibylle struggled with redoubled shrieks, M. de Férias took hold of her, lifted her from the ground, and, walking quickly back to the castle, he deposited the child in one of the lower rooms and locked the door; then he returned to his wife, and, sinking tremblingly into a chair, "My dear," said he, "my only consolation is, that I suffer more than she does."

There are readers without children, and we must not forget it. Therefore we will not follow the footsteps of M. de Férias through all the course of his painful and praiseworthy application of his system of education. Suffice it to say, that after a pretty frequent recurrence of scenes similar to the one we have just related, Sibylle began perfectly to understand that the nature of things and the superior wisdom of her grandfather must, and should, in many cases, stem the torrent of her will, until she should be able to comprehend the nature of the moral law, which was to restrain its course and direct its bent. The day came when it was sufficient for M. de Férias to say to her, smilingly, "Sibylle, do you want to ride upon the swan?"

to calm the tempest of any unreasonable caprice. And of her impetuous instincts there only remained the persevering and passionate firmness which usually accompanies noble aspirations. Mme. de Beaumesnil, a jealous witness of these happy results, now changed her tune; instead of pitying Sibylle's grandparents, she began to pity Sibylle herself.

"Really," said she, "those old Férias can have no more feeling than a stone, to beat that poor little creature,—an orphan too; for although they have never done it before me (they would not dare, for they know my heart, and I would not bear it), one can easily see that the child is accustomed to being beaten. She trembles in their presence, she detests them, and they certainly deserve it."

Mme. de Beaumesnil was mistaken. In the heart of a little child there exists the same feeling of profound justice as in the soul of a great nation. Children love their parents, just as nations do their rulers, when they respect them. Sibylle, so far from detesting M. and Mme. de Férias, loved them with a discerning affection uncommon at her age. She admired, as well as adored them. Her keen and enthusiastic mind could understand and revere the beautiful inner life of the old people, the exquisite intimacy, the quiet dignity, the somewhat patriarchal discipline, which pervaded the house of her fathers. Besides, contrasts were not wanting to enlighten

her judgment. Sometimes she went to pass a day with Mme. de Beaumesnil, who professed to entertain for her the feelings of a mother, and who manifested her affection by overwhelming her with absurd flattery and with unwholesome dainties.

On these occasions the trivial gossip of her hostess, the undignified familiarity of Mile. Constance with the servants, the insipid gayety of M. de Beaumesnil, the drinking-songs of the chevalier, and the boisterous turbulence of beautiful, dark-eyed Clotilde, older than herself by four or five years, excited in Sibylle a sort of surprise mingled with disgust, which she sometimes naively expressed.

"Were you amused, my darling?" said to her Mme. de Férias?

"Yes, grandmother, they amused me very much, but I was very tired."

Always, after making one of these excursions, Sibylle felt more than ever the charm of the moral atmosphere which she breathed at Férias, and a new delight in the caresses of her good relatives.

The Marquis of Férias had a personal superintendence over the affairs of his extensive domains. His custom was, himself to distribute on Saturday of each week the pay of the laborers employed on the estate, when he took the opportunity of informing himself in regard to the condition of their affairs, and of supplying their wants when charity was needed. The ceremony of the weekly payment was one of Sibylle's great-

est pleasures. In fine weather it took place on a lawn which divided the park from the farm; at the end of the day the Marquis and Marchioness would seat themselves on a bench shaded by a group of oak-trees, Sibylle placing herself gravely between them. First, she listened to the distant singing of the reapers; then she watched the long file as they appeared on the top of a hill which overlooked the park. They descended, still singing, the pruning-knife in the hand or the pitchfork on the shoulder, by a path which led across the heath, and only stopped their song when they reached an opening in the hedge, in front of the oak-trees. Then they ranged themselves on the lawn, and received in turn their pay, and frequently something more, from the hands of the proud and delighted Sibylle. M. de Férias had inherited from his forefathers another custom which he maintained with the same fidelity. At the hour of the Angelas he was accustomed to assemble in the library of the castle the servants of the household, and also the workmen residing on the estate, and to read aloud to them the evening prayer, adding some remarks appropriate to the circumstances of his listeners. The subdued light, the careful tread which marked the entrance and exit of the respectful subordinates, the tears which sometimes filled the eyes of Mme. de Férias, the occasionally touching allusions of the old Marquis, — all combined to shed over this consecrated

hour a penetrating and mysterious charm for Sibylle.

She had also less grave pleasures. Mme. de Férias, next after her husband and her granddaughter, was passionately fond of two things, — flowers and rare fowls. Perhaps she expressed for them a greater fondness in order to give her husband the ineffable pleasure of gratifying her tastes. Whether this were the case or not, scarcely a week passed without the Marchioness finding under her window a flower-pot or a cage, which appeared to have fallen from heaven during the night; and frequently M. de Férias, concealed in the thicket with Sibylle by his side, would watch the delighted surprise of his wife. In consequence of these attentions, constantly repeated during so many years, the conservatories and the poultry-yards of Férias were a matter of wonder and admiration to all the surrounding country. The Marchioness passed a large portion of her time in these delightful places, where she blessed the goodness of God and the kindness of her husband, and where, also, she would shed tears; but for Sibylle this paradise was unequalled. This country of flowers and birds, of which her grandmother seemed the queen, enchanted the child. It appeared to her like fairy-land, and her grandfather, the creator of these magical effects, was to her almost superhuman. Madame de Férias looked upon her husband with no less favorable eyes. Sibylle, seeing her one day leaning out of a window of the

conservatory, looking with a pleased intentness, put her head out also, and perceived M. de Férias watering a rose-bush in the morning sun.

"My darling," said the Marchioness, "is not your grandfather handsome?"

Sibylle ran out quickly, and, approaching the old Marquis, she interpreted to him this expression of affection in her somewhat proud language: "Grandfather, the Marchioness of Férias sends me to tell you she thinks you handsome."

The Marquis smiled. "Nonsense! go tell her that it is she who is charming." Then, calling her back, "Take her this flower," added he.

#### IV.

##### SIBYLLE'S MADMAN.

THE pure and brilliant atmosphere of one of those beautiful days in midsummer when the sun is shining in the azure of a cloudless sky gives a sense of tranquillity and peace which seems as if it might be permanent and abiding. Notwithstanding, how frequently will the clouds gather, the winds rise, and give tokens that the beautiful day will end in a storm!

This familiar comparison may serve to indicate a new phase in the young life of Sibylle, after five or six years of the entire serenity we have depicted. Suddenly her temper became uncertain. She was sometimes wildly gay, then some passing cloud seemed to send a shiver through her young heart, and her fair head would

droop like an ear of corn in the wind. She was seized with a strong fancy for solitude, and would insist upon her nurse going with her into the woods, which surrounded the park of Férias, where she sometimes would remain the whole day.

"What can she do all day in the woods, nurse? What pleasure can she find there?" inquired M. de Férias, puzzled by this singular conduct.

"My Lord Marquis," answered the nurse, "this is what she does. We walk about quietly for a while, and Mademoiselle is as good as possible. But, if she gets a glimpse of the blue sea, through the trees, she is excited; she claps her hands, and cries out, 'The sea, the sea!' Then she takes hold of my hand, and makes me run with her so fast that I can scarcely keep my feet; but she keeps crying out, 'The sea, the sea!' and laughs as if she were delighted. Then I sit down at the foot of a tree and take out my work, and my young lady beside me; everything seems to amuse her; a leaf, a flower, a piece of moss, she will examine in her serious way, sometimes for an hour. Then, again, she will throw herself on the grass, and sleep like a partridge in a furrow. I say she sleeps, but, indeed, I am not sure, for to-day, when I lifted up her hat, which had fallen over her face, she was crying. Perhaps some dream made her cry."

This last account excited the anxiety of the Marquis. Sibylle was called.

"My darling," said he, "why did

you weep to-day in the woods? Does anything trouble you? Are you unhappy?"

"O no," replied the child, putting her arms round her grandfather's neck.

"Then why did you cry?"

"I do not know; for nothing at all."

And he had to be satisfied with this answer.

There was one spot in the woods of Férias for which Sibylle manifested an especial predilection. It was a narrow ravine, through which ran a stream, almost hidden by its green banks. At the source of the stream the ground was very irregular, and through a large rock trickled tiny streams of water, which fell into a natural basin below. This weeping rock, overhung with thick shade-trees, festooned with vines, and carpeted by damp mosses and large leaves, presented in this lonely spot a wild and charming aspect which had gained for it the honors of a legend, of which the name only now remained; it was called the Fairy Rock. This name, which called to mind the fairy tales of her childhood, had a particular attraction for Sibylle. She would stand by it for hours, half enchanted, half fearful. She expected an adventure. Two here happened to her. One summer evening she had repaired to the Fairy Rock, whilst her nurse, as usual, was working at the foot of a tree in another part of the wood. Sibylle liked to be alone with her rock. Mlle. de Férias was now a

little girl of seven or eight years old, tall for her age, elegant and graceful. The thick masses of her fair hair were confined by a net, and the weight appeared to incline her to throw back her head with a motion full of haughty grace. She usually wore a large hat, round which was twined a long black feather, which fell partially over her forehead, and seemed to cast upon her naturally deep eyes a rather wild shadow; but sometimes she would wreath her hair with vines and flowers, so as to make for herself one of those heavy crowns seen in pictures on the heads of young shepherds playing the flute in scenes of mythology.

That evening this fancy had seized her, and, using the little fountain as a mirror, she had woven for herself a head-dress of rustic grace. She held in her hand a wand, from which she had stripped the bark; and, standing on the brink of the basin, she would raise it from time to time with mysterious signs, as if she were playing a part in some fairy idyl. Suddenly, the copse in front of her parted, and a young man jumped lightly upon the platform which surrounded the fountain. Sibylle stepped back, and opened her lips to scream; then she stopped, motionless, leaning upon her wand in a courageous attitude, her eyes fixed upon the stranger. There was nothing, indeed, alarming in his appearance; he was a young man, not more than twenty years old, dressed simply as a traveller; tall, active, with air of

youthful grace; and with bright, kind eyes. The unexpected apparition of the child, her beauty, the singular crown on her head, her courageous attitude, at first filled the young man with silent astonishment. At last he smiled, murmured a few words to himself, and then said aloud, "Pardon me, mademoiselle; perhaps I am upon your grounds."

"Yes," replied Sibylle.

"Excuse my intrusion; I came," said he, showing his portfolio, "to sketch in these woods, which were, I supposed, open to the public."

Sibylle making no answer, he turned to go.

"I am sorry to leave," he resumed, gayly. "This is such a beautiful spot! May I ask its name?"

"The Fairy Rock."

"Ah! then you are the Fairy," said the young man, amused by the serious manner of the child.

A smile passed over Sibylle's proud face. "Yes," said she.

"Would you allow me to draw your portrait?"

"No."

"Will you at least permit me to ask your name?"

"Sibylle."

"Adieu, then, Mlle. Sibylle. Would you give me a kiss, my child?"

"No."

"Will you let me kiss your hand?"

Sibylle put out her hand with the air of an infant. The young man smiled, and kissed it gravely.

"Thank you, mademoiselle. Now I will go, and I assure you I shall never forget either the rock or the

fairy. Will you not, also, keep a little memory of me in your pretty head?"

"I do not know your name."

"My name is Raoul. Will you remember it?"

"Always," said the child.

Raoul, a little confused, without exactly knowing why, looked at her for a moment with an awkward smile; then he respectfully said "Adieu," and disappeared in the copse.

Some days after this the Marchioness of Férias, with her granddaughter on her knee, thus began one of those stories in which she excelled:—

"There was in the forest, on the banks of the Ganges, a king's son, who was hunting. He was beautiful as the day, witty and modest. His name was —"

The Marchioness not finding a name for the king's son, Sibylle instantly supplied one. "Raoul," said she.

"Why Raoul?" asked Mme. de Férias, a little surprised.

A slight blush passed over the cheeks of the child. From a feeling which she would have found it impossible to explain, she had made an innocent mystery of her interview with the unknown. Now she confided it to her grandmother that, as this Raoul had appeared to her beautiful as the day, witty and modest, his name naturally came into her mind to baptize the king's son, who had exactly the same qualities. Madame de Férias laughed heartily at the history, but she ascertained the next day, on visiting the town of Férias,

that the prince, Raoul, who was, they told her, a fine young man, and of good family, had left the country on the evening of the same day he had appeared in the wood; therefore Sibylle was allowed to continue freely her beloved excursions, and a short time afterwards she met, on the same spot, with a second adventure, which requires a few words of preface.

The stream which receives the waters of the fairy rock of Férias, and which, continuing its course through the woods, falls into the sea at a distance of two leagues, receives on its way the water of two or three tributaries, which swell the stream to a sufficient size to turn a mill which formerly stood on the edge of the forest. The miller who owned the mill was called Jacques Féray. He at first had served as a sailor, and, at his return, his faithful *fiancée* had become his wife, and assisted him in the management of the mill. It was a happy household. Jacques Féray was a brave, good-humored fellow. He had a fine voice, which he used to exercise in his night-watches on board ship, and when his wife presented him with a little girl, he would rock the cradle and sing her to sleep. In front of the mill was a small garden, in which were some fig-trees and three bee-hives; and the joyful young miller, with his songs, his pretty wife, and the tiny child, who soon began to dance to her father's music, made a bright, pretty picture in the sunshine. After five or six years of happiness, a fearful misfortune overtook this happy family. One stormy

autumn night the canton of Férias was visited by a flood, which continued to increase all the next day; and the following night, the peaceful brook, swollen to a raging torrent, overflowed its banks and the neighboring fields, and carried away the mill. Jacques Féray with great difficulty saved his wife and child from drowning; but he was entirely ruined, his house and mill and implements all gone, and also a considerable provision of grain and flour destroyed. In a few days his wife and child both died from the effects of cold and exposure, and were buried together in the churchyard of Férias. The following day the curé went, out of compassion, to see the poor man. He found him lying on his face in the yellow mud which now covered his little garden, formerly so gay and pretty.

"Come, Jacques," said the curé, trying to rouse him.

Jacques never stirred.

"My friend," said the curé, "I entreat you!"

Jacques raised his head. "Go away," said he. "There is no good God!"

The curé, unable to get from him any other answer, went sorrowfully away. The next day he went again, and found him in the same place and the same position, and still answering his attempts at consolation by this one phrase: "There is no good God!"

It soon became evident that the mind of the poor man was seriously affected. He left the ruins of his



mill, took refuge in a miserable hut on the top of a hill, where sheep had been used to resort for shelter from the heat, and there he lived like a wild beast. Sometimes he was heard, especially in stormy weather, uttering shrieks which would make the passers-by shiver with horror. In the early days of his insanity, several times, in the morning, the panes of glass in the windows of the church of Férias were found broken, and the aisles covered with stones. A watch was kept, and Jacques Féray was discovered throwing stones, with childish fury, against the house of God, who had so sorely afflicted him. They talked of arresting and imprisoning him; but the good curé had pity on him, and nothing was done. This was the only act of violence which he committed. He was otherwise inoffensive, although his appearance was repulsive. After a time he became more an object of ridicule than of dread. He was called "the crazy Féray," and while the farmers were giving him a little food, the children would often fasten rags on his back.

One day Sibylle, having left her nurse some distance off, was kneeling on the brink of the basin into which fell the water from the Fairy Rock. She had taken off her hat, and, after examining curiously a few moments the vegetation in the bottom of the basin, she had almost hidden herself among the grasses and flowers that grew on the brink; seized with one of those fits of sadness to which she had lately been subject, she began to

cry, and watched her tears fall drop by drop into the pure and transparent water. A slight sound caused her to raise her head, and she perceived the madman, Féray, opposite to her on his knees among the brambles. His head was covered with the remnants of a straw hat, he was pale, thin, and frightful in appearance; his gaze was fixed on Sibylle with a singular intensity of expression; large tears fell from his hollow eyes on his long gray beard. Although the child was brave, still the sight of this spectre made her tremble; she tried to call, but could not utter a sound. The madman comprehended her terror, and said in a low and plaintive tone, "Do not be frightened, I will not hurt you." Then he rose, and while Sibylle also rose mechanically, he approached, and looked at her fixedly.

"Poor child!" murmured he, "poor child!" And throwing himself on the ground he sobbed, with his head in his hands.

Sibylle knew the story of the poor man, and she began to comprehend that some vague resemblance recalled to him the little girl he had lost; her fear was conquered by pity; she knelt down and gently passed her white hand over the head of the madman. Then, as if frightened at her own temerity, she ran to join her nurse, who was not a little alarmed on seeing Jacques Féray coming after them. He followed them to the castle like a dog. M. and Mme. de Férias, touched with Sibylle's account of him, approached the unfortunate creature, who had stopped behind the

iron railing of the park, spoke kindly to him, and filled his bag with provisions. From this time forward his insanity appeared to assume a milder form. Nearly every day he presented himself at the gate of the castle, and Sibylle would run to meet him with her hands full. She often met him in her walks; he had observed her fondness for wild-flowers, and he would bring enormous bouquets of them and lay them silently at her feet. She would smilingly say, "Thank you, Jacques," and he would go away satisfied. The Marquis and Marchioness called him Sibylle's madman. Sibylle was pleased and somewhat proud of her influence over the lunatic. On one point, however, she failed in an attempt she made, by the advice of her parents, to induce him to attend mass in the church of Férias; when they reached the graveyard he uttered a wild shriek, and fled quickly out of her sight.

About two months after her first meeting with the madman, Sibylle received a visit from her friend Clotilde Desrozaïs, who was now preparing to enter a convent in Paris, for the purpose of finishing, or rather commencing, her education. Clotilde was now about thirteen years of age; she was tall, beautifully formed, with superb eyes and heavy braids of blue-black hair; and between her crimson lips shone teeth of a pearly whiteness. She appeared to have a quick intellect and strong feelings; but, in fact, it was not easy to tell what elements predominated in her untamed nature; and Sibylle felt for

her an affection, mingled with anxiety. Clotilde one moment would torment her by her turbulent caprices, and the next seduce her by her effusions of tenderness. She would put her arms round her, and say, with tears in her eyes, "How I love you, Sibylle! I shall always love you. Swear that you will always love me."

Mlle. Desrozaïs had then come to pass the day at Férias. While Sibylle was preparing a collation for her friend, the latter spied from a window the madman, Féray, sleeping in the shade in the court-yard of the castle. Clotilde, without saying a word to any one, ran to the kitchen and procured a ball of twine, on which she strung horse-shoes, spurs, and pieces of broken glass, which she picked up here and there, and then went and fastened these ornaments to the clothes of the sleeping madman. Then she called her dog Max, a fierce creature, who followed her wherever she went, and awakened the madman by calling to the dog to bite him. Jacques Féray was extremely afraid of dogs, who frequently attacked him. Seeing the bull-dog springing towards him, he began to run wildly. The noise of the appendages which hung to him frightened him still more. He ran from one gate to the other, panting and screaming, with the dog barking at his heels, to the great delight of the beautiful Clotilde. But now Sibylle, attracted by the noise, ran to the window and saw what was going on. Instantly she bounded into the court-yard, and reached the madman at the

moment when the dog had seized hold of the rags in which he was clothed. The child used all her strength to protect him from the ferocious animal, who turned on her with sudden fury and bit her arm, from which the blood began to flow. The servants ran out, called off the dog, and carried Sibylle, fainting, into the house. Seeing the consequences of her mischievous conduct, Clotilde burst into tears; but as she went home she saw Jacques Féray, still stretched on the pavement, raise the horse-shoe with which she had adorned him, and shake it at her in a threatening manner. She only laughed at the silent threat of the idiot, and she made a mistake when she did so.

## V.

## MISS O'NEIL.

M. DE FÉRIAS, who thought the moral training of a child should commence from the cradle, nevertheless had been in no haste to begin the intellectual education of his granddaughter. Now, however, it had become necessary to have an instructress for her, and M. de Férias thought it best to apply to his cousin, the Count de Vergnes, the maternal grandfather of Sibylle, whose residence in Paris, and whose extensive acquaintance, would afford him facilities for making a selection in so important a matter. He therefore wrote to the Count a grave and touching letter, in which he dilated upon the dispo-

sition and qualities of his granddaughter, and begged him to neglect no precautions in order that the teacher might be worthy of the pupil. A month afterwards, as M. de Férias began to be uneasy at the silence of the Count, he received the following reply: —

“MY DEAR COUSIN: After diving repeatedly, like a fisherman of pearls, into the ocean of Paris, I believe I have discovered the treasure you ask for. The person in question has not, it is true, a very attractive physiognomy. They say, however, she is an angel without wings. She is not my *beau idéal* of an angel, but no matter for that; and I send her to you at the same time with my letter. Send your carriage to — Station, evening train. The lady has just finished the education of a pupil, for which she has not been too well paid. Your servant will recognize her by this description: Miss O'Neil (Augusta Mary), thirty years old, with red hair, Irish, of an old and noble family, speaks all the dead and living languages, works, paints, plays the harp, and rides on horseback. Any number of *et cetera*.

“A shower of kisses for Sibylle. I throw myself at the feet of the Marchioness.”

A letter like this, upon a subject so interesting and important in the eyes of the Marquis, appeared to him an inexcusable piece of frivolity, and although he knew that, notwithstanding this worldly and flighty

style of expressing himself, M. de Vergnes was really wanting neither in sense nor in feeling, still it was not without some apprehensions that he drove in person to the railway station at —, to meet the governess who had been described to him in such equivocal terms. The first appearance of Miss O'Neil, descending from the railway-carriage with her travelling-bag in her hand, was far from reassuring the Marquis; he recognized her at once, even in the twilight. She was tall, thin, and angular, and she walked with the stiffness and precision of an automaton; she had high cheek-bones, and her red hair fell in long curls on either side of her face. A brown straw hat surmounted like a dome this unattractive physiognomy. His heart sank within him. "Really," murmured he, "De Vergnes is inexcusable."

However, when he came nearer to Miss O'Neil, he observed in her pale blue eyes an expression so pure, so kind, and so candid, that he was touched by it, and his prejudice was soon half conquered. Miss O'Neil, herself painfully conscious of her unprepossessing exterior, replied to the courteous greeting of the old Marquis a little awkwardly, but still in a simple and ladylike manner. Her voice, too, was particularly sweet and musical. M. de Férias began to think with M. de Vergnes that she might indeed be an angel, although at first the wings were but little apparent. He seated her beside him in the carriage, and soon

began to enlighten her as to the disposition and mind of the young pupil who was to be intrusted to her care, ending with a brief repetition of his own views and system of education.

Miss O'Neil listened attentively, and when he had finished she answered, "Sir, I perfectly understand your description of the disposition of the child. As for your principles, they are mine also. To develop and cultivate the natural gifts of the intellect is always safe, if at the same time the idea of God and religion be the predominant and sanctifying one."

The Marquis shook his head with an air of great satisfaction, so that a cloud of perfumed powder could be perceived in the carriage. "My dear Miss O'Neil," returned he, "may I now ask you to tell me something of your own history, upon which my cousin De Vergnes has informed me but little; but, understand, that I ask you, not from curiosity, but on account of the interest with which you have already inspired me."

The kind politeness of the old Marquis was most gratifying to Miss O'Neil. Long accustomed to an atmosphere of cold civility, which had chilled and repressed her, she had deeply suffered in her feelings and in her pride. For the first time in her life she felt she was appreciated, and this charming old man spoke to her in a tone she had scarcely hoped to hear in this world. Unseen in the darkness, tears filled her eyes, while she briefly related her history, which was very simple. The only

point on which she spoke much was on the antiquity of her family ; for she was, she said, descended from the kings of Ireland. Her father had left her a comfortable fortune, but her two brothers had not managed her affairs with the prudence that would have been desirable. M. de Férias understood that her property had been absorbed by fraternal extravagance. Fortunately, the employment she had selected was one congenial to her tastes, and she had great pleasure in educating her last pupil, but parting from her had almost broken her heart.

Thus, when M. de Férias and Miss O'Neil descended from the carriage into the court-yard of the castle, the most friendly understanding was established between them. In a few moments after the Marchioness, to whom her husband had imparted his favorable opinion, completed the delight of the Irish girl by the benevolent kindness of her reception. It was now late. They took Miss O'Neil into the room where Sibylle lay sleeping under the white curtains of her bed, her head on one arm, which was nearly hidden by her silken tresses, and in the graceful position childhood usually assumes even in sleep. Miss O'Neil looked upon her with delight, and turning to the grandparents said, "She is an angel. I love her already."

She was then installed into a neighboring apartment, of a size and luxury to which she had been little accustomed. The tapestry of the

room was covered with figures of shepherds and shepherdesses, who appeared to be happy, but assuredly they were less so than Miss O'Neil. Nevertheless, a flaming sword, ready to drive her from this paradise, hung over the devoted head of this innocent creature.

The next morning Mme. de Férias, after another conversation with Miss O'Neil, which only served to confirm the favorable impressions she had received from her husband in regard to her, presented the instructress to her pupil. Sibylle, who possessed, to a degree uncommon at her age, an appreciation of beauty and harmony, looked anxiously at Miss O'Neil, and responded coldly to her advances, with the air of a person not favorably disposed, and who reserves her opinion. The Marchioness left them together to become better acquainted, and descended to the drawing-room.

Here she found M. de Férias dilating upon the merits of Miss O'Neil to the Abbé Rénaud and Mme. de Beaumesnil, whom the importance of this event had already attracted to the castle.

"Well, my dear?" said the Marquis.

"Well, my friend, as far as I am able to judge she has an enlarged mind and a most religious spirit."

"You see," resumed the Marquis, with a radiant air, "we have discovered a diamond. We must allow that De Vergnes, with all his frivolity, has shown rare tact and judgment. It is true that she is not

handsome, but this will be for Sibylle a living demonstration of the small value of physical advantages compared with moral qualities, such as Miss O'Neil possesses, — nobility of sentiments, purity of heart, mental charms —

"Sweetness of temper," said the good Marchioness.

"And solid religious principles," added the curé.

In the midst of this concert of praise the door of the saloon was noisily opened, and the nurse, who went by the name of Madame Rose, entered abruptly in a state of evident consternation, which announced a serious catastrophe.

"In Heaven's name, nurse, what is the matter?" exclaimed the Marquis, rising.

"My Lord Marquis," answered Mme. Rose, almost breathless, "she is not a Christian."

"What? who? Miss O'Neil? Not a Christian, — nurse, you are crazy!"

"She is not a Christian," replied Mme. Rose; "it is a sure thing, since she has just asked John whether there was a Protestant minister in the neighborhood, and whether she would be able to go every Sunday to the temple."

"A Protestant!" said the Marquis, sinking, quite overcome, into his arm-chair. "A Protestant!" Then, after a pause, "Mme. Rose," said he, in a changed voice, "that will do, you can go now."

A few minutes of profound silence ensued; the Marchioness exchanged with her husband sorrowful glances;

the curé and Mme. de Beaumesnil, took each other's hands, and raised them with an air of consternation, sincere in the former, but not so in the case of the lady, for, in reality, this unexpected blow to her neighbors only gave her great satisfaction.

"Certainly," said the Marquis, angrily, "this is unpardonable in De Vergnes! not to have informed himself on so essential a point, — I suppose he would as soon have sent me a Jewess or a Mahometan, — just like him. As for me, how could I imagine such negligence? The idea never occurred to me. Besides, being an Irishwoman, it seemed so unlikely. However, we all understand that the nurse, when she refused Miss O'Neil the name of Christian, spoke like an ignorant woman, as she is. Miss O'Neil is not a Catholic, but, notwithstanding the deplorable errors of her belief, she is still a worthy and interesting person. What am I to do?"

"It appears to me," said the curé, timidly, "it would scarcely be right to leave Mlle. Sibylle under the care of a Protestant instructress, particularly as the child will soon prepare for her first communion."

"Yes, indeed!" cried Mme. de Beaumesnil.

"I know it cannot be," returned the Marquis. "I do not dream of it; but I must confess I am bitterly disappointed at being obliged to deprive my granddaughter of the advantage of the instructions of a person possessing so many accomplishments, and, I must also say, so many virtues. I

also dread to think of the blow it will be to Miss O'Neil. What would I not give if I could spare her and myself the explanation and separation which seem to be inevitable!"

"It is certainly hard, my friend," said the Marchioness; "but since it is necessary —"

"The sooner the better," said Mme. de Beaumesnil, roughly.

"Excuse me, madame," replied the Marquis, rather quickly, "you do not, I presume, expect me to drive away this young woman, as if she were a thief, only because she is a Protestant."

After a silence of a few moments the Marchioness said, gently, "I was going to say, my friend, that, if you wish, I will be the bearer of your intentions to Miss O'Neil."

"No, no, my dear; you are always ready to take upon yourself everything that is painful, but it would not be fair. Do you know whether Miss O'Neil is alone?"

"Sibylle is with her."

"Send for the child."

The poor governess, meantime, when the departure of the Marchioness had left her alone with Sibylle, could not but observe in the countenance of her pupil the unfavorable impression she had made upon her. She took care not to make any attempt to remove this feeling by any special attentions or unwelcome caresses. She did not offer to kiss the little girl, but, smiling gently, she invited her to accompany her to her room and assist her in unpacking her trunks, always an interesting opera-

tion to a child. She began by taking out her simple wardrobe, and while this was going on Sibylle stood in the middle of the room, her arms crossed behind her back, silently and rather contemptuously watching the motions of the busy Miss O'Neil; but her pretty face grew brighter, and soon displayed a lively interest, when she saw her produce from the depths of a chest an herbal, then a palette, paint-brushes and an easel, and, lastly, half a dozen pictures painted by herself. The child then began to question her in a most animated manner; but she altogether stopped at the appearance of a harp which the Irish lady took from its case, and when Miss O'Neil, after placing the instrument on its gilded base, struck a few chords with an absent air, the enthusiasm of Sibylle for this wonderful stranger could no longer be repressed.

"Will you teach me everything you know, Miss O'Neil?"

"Certainly, my dear, everything."

"Shall I learn to know, like you, the names of all the flowers?"

"You shall learn them all, my child."

"Shall I play on that beautiful instrument, like the angels?"

"Yes, like the angels."

"And shall I paint pictures like yours?"

"Certainly, and better ones, I hope."

"I do not think that would be possible, Miss O'Neil; they are magnificent." And in order to evince to Miss O'Neil her respectful admira-

tion, Sibylle hastened to render her all the little services in her power. She helped her to arrange all these interesting objects, and when the time came to hang the pictures, she mounted on a chair to hand the nails to Miss O'Neil. These pictures, although not so magnificent as they appeared to Sibylle, were not destitute of merit, but there was in their composition a certain monotony, for they nearly all, in fact, represented the same subject; and on the frames were engraved the words: *View of a lake by moonlight*, — by Miss O'Neil. *The moon rising on the shore of a lake*, — by Miss O'Neil. *A lake, — moonlight effect*, — by Miss O'Neil, etc.

The Irish lady, having finished her task with the help of her little friend, drew from the case a last picture, wrapped in linen and sealed up. "This, my child," said Miss O'Neil, "is not mine; it is the work of the young girl who, before you, was my only pupil. The dear child worked at it privately, for a month before my departure, and she begged me not to unfold it until I should reach my destination."

With a trembling hand she now removed the envelope. The picture upon which Miss O'Neil fixed her expectant eyes represented a lake of an apple-green color, brilliantly lighted by an enormous moon, in the midst of which floated a cradle, containing a child whose features presented a caricature of those of Miss O'Neil. On the border was written, *Infancy of Miss O'Neil on a lake. — Moonlight effect.*

The young lady, her late pupil, had apparently thought it a good joke to take leave of her governess with this witty and amiable allusion to her fondness for picturesque effects.

Poor Miss O'Neil, overcome by her feelings, burst into tears, and, sinking into a chair, "Oh!" exclaimed she, "what cruelty! It is then true — after all I have done — she has no heart. O, how hard it is to bear! You do not understand, my dear," said she to Sibylle, who, in fact did not comprehend, but who looked at her with an expression of pity and sympathy, "but I will explain this to you. I took care of this young girl for ten years, I educated her, I caressed her, I worshipped her. To remain with her, I would have been her servant, a servant to her children; and, you see, her last thought, her last action, has been to mock me, to insult me! And I loved her so well, better than her own mother ever loved her. It breaks my heart!"

And she hid her face in her hands.

"Do not cry, Miss O'Neil," said Sibylle, trying to take her hands; "I will love you if you will let me."

"O my dear child!" said Miss O'Neil, sobbing.

"You will never leave me, Miss O'Neil."

"No, never, never."

"What is your name, Miss O'Neil?"

"Augusta Mary."

"Well then, Augusta Mary, we will always live together."

Miss O'Neil took the child up in her arms, and, pressing her convul-



sively to her heart, overwhelmed her with tears and caresses.

The nurse surprised them in this affectionate attitude.

"My young lady is wanted in the drawing-room," said she, stiffly.

Sibylle kissed her friend, and followed the nurse down stairs.

"My darling, your eyes are red. What has happened?" said the Marchioness, as Sibylle entered.

"I have been crying with Miss O'Neil. Her other pupil has treated her so badly; but I have consoled her by promising her she shall never leave me."

"Well," said the Marquis, "this is too much. My dear child, you must give up this idea; an unforeseen circumstance obliges us to part with Miss O'Neil."

"Grandfather, you would not treat her so. Remember, she is alone in the world, poor and unhappy. Besides, I love her with all my heart."

"My dear," replied the Marquis, "I am as much grieved as you can be; but, unhappily, we have no choice. We have just learned that Miss O'Neil is of the Protestant religion, which is a false and wrong religion."

"I cannot believe Miss O'Neil has a bad religion, grandfather. You may be sure it is not true. Her heart is too good for that, and then she plays the harp like Saint Cecilia."

"We are not talking of the harp," answered M. de Férias, rather impatiently. "I repeat, that Miss O'Neil, with all her good qualities, is, unfor-

tunately, not of our religion, which is the only good and true one."

"Well, then, grandfather, we must teach it to her; I am sure she will be very grateful. Our dear curé will teach her. Will you not, sir?"

The curé moved his chair uneasily.

"Besides," said Sibylle, putting her arms round her grandfather's neck, "when she lives with you, she will see that your religion is the best, — that there cannot be a better one!"

"Stop, stop," said the poor Marquis, looking timidly towards the curé.

The curé sighed, and answered, "Sir, you know sometimes God puts the truth in the mouth of a child."

The Marquis caught at this. "You know, curé, how much I am interested in this poor young woman; another word, and she remains."

"One might perhaps try for a time," said the curé.

"She stays, she stays," cried Sibylle. "Thank you, grandfather; thank you, curé." She bounded up stairs to Miss O'Neil, who then heard for the first time of her danger and her safety from the little seraph who had covered her with her wings.

## VI.

### SIBYLLE OUT OF THE PALE OF THE CHURCH.

THE generous decision of M. de Férias in the case of Miss O'Neil, which was immediately spread abroad and commented upon throughout the

neighborhood by Mme. de Beaumesnil, was not considered at all to his credit nor to that of the curé, who was regarded as his accomplice. It must be confessed that, to those who did not understand the merits of the case, the proceeding would naturally appear a somewhat irregular one. M. de Férias himself, on mature consideration, felt rather uneasy at the responsibility he had assumed in placing his granddaughter under the care of an heretical instructress. As for the poor priest, in addition to the gossip of his neighbors and the pricks of his conscience, he had the pain of receiving on this occasion the compliments of the judge of the canton, an old man who believed in little besides Voltaire, of whom he appeared to consider himself the prophet. The Abbé Rénaud, on his way to the castle a few days after the arrival of Miss O'Neil, met the Voltairian magistrate, and was so much disturbed by the equivocal praises he heard from him, that when, on reaching his destination, he found the Marquis taking his morning walk under the avenue of chestnut-trees, he candidly confided to him his mortification and his scruples.

"My worthy friend," replied M. de Férias, "you may well imagine that I myself am not on a bed of roses; like you, I have heard the murmurs of public opinion, and I agree with you in thinking the praise of the judge a bad symptom; for the wise man tells us that, next to the grief of our friends, we should dread the joy of our enemies. Neverthe-

less, my dear abbé, I shall retain Miss O'Neil, for in the course of my long life I have frequently observed that the impulses of the heart, sometimes more difficult to follow than the dictates of a selfish and worldly prudence, although condemned by the world, are often blessed by Providence. However, to secure the help of God we must help ourselves; and you and I, my worthy friend, must neglect no precaution in order that we may maintain our position under circumstances of so much delicacy and importance, — I mean, so as to secure to Sibylle the advantages of the superior education Miss O'Neil appears so capable of imparting to her, and at the same time to keep the child in all the integrity of the faith of her forefathers."

In order to attain successfully this twofold object, although two years were still wanting to the time fixed for Sibylle's first communion, it was agreed that the Abbé Rénaud should commence immediately a course of instruction calculated to place upon the surest foundation the orthodox faith of Mlle. de Férias. Thus, at the same time, Miss O'Neil might safely be allowed to proceed with the moral and intellectual culture of Sibylle Anne. M. de Férias entertained no doubt that the governess would faithfully observe the formal request he had made, that she should never enter upon religious topics with her pupil, except in the way of general morality; but in case — for the thing was possible — Miss O'Neil should disappoint the good opinion

of M. de Férias, and, yielding to the spirit of proselytism characteristic of her sect, should even one day produce a Bible from her pocket, and enter upon a course of polemics, — then the Abbé Rénaud would be there, on the watch, to detect the first signs of her deviation from the path of rectitude.

At first M. de Férias took the precaution of being always present at the lessons given by the Irish lady, or else his absence was supplied by the Marchioness; but he soon began to remit a surveillance which he saw was unnecessary when he became better acquainted with the scrupulously honorable character of Miss O'Neil; and of this the Marchioness and the curé were equally convinced with himself.

These three good people, now that their scruples of conscience were at rest, were delighted to observe the rapid progress of Sibylle under the almost magical influence of Miss O'Neil. Indeed, her rare faculties of mind would have been in danger of a too rapid development, but for the wise method of her teacher, who was fully equal to the performance of the task upon which she had entered.

"I might," said the latter to Mme. de Férias, "easily educate her into a prodigy; but I prefer rather to keep her back than urge her forward, and to make her in time a distinguished woman."

M. and Mme. de Férias were delighted with the zeal and the progress of their granddaughter, and not less so with the favorable change

they saw in her disposition, from the time that regular studies and pursuits had occupied her thoughts. Although still a very serious child, Sibylle had lost the habit of those confused reveries of which she had been so fond, and which had given her an expression of melancholy not natural at her age. Now her childish and musical laugh constantly awoke the echoes of the old corridors. She even frequently manifested in their family life a jocular spirit, which usually broke out rather abruptly, and formed a pleasant contrast with her habitually grave demeanor. Sibylle had in her composition a strong vein of satire and a quick sense of the ridiculous, which, unaccompanied by a kind heart, might have made her appear unamiable. She not unfrequently drew caricatures, not very artistic, but expressively comic; and her grandfather could scarce refrain from a smile when, in one of her pictures in this style, the manly mustache of Mme. de Beaumesnil, and the Roman nose of the chevalier Theodore, figured in rather remarkable proportions. Mme. de Beaumesnil, although unconscious of this incident, it may well be believed, took a very small share in the happy feelings which the successful tuition of Miss O'Neil produced in the castle of Férias.

"Curé," she said, "you will see if something does not happen to bring down the pride of the Férias; for such obstinacy and mistaken toleration cannot turn out well. As for

you, I do not blame you so much, for I suppose you expected to convert this unhappy creature; but, between ourselves, you must confess you have been mistaken there."

The curé acknowledged it. With the instinct of malice, Mme. de Beaumesnil had touched the tender spot in this kind heart. Indeed, it was not without some bitterness of feeling that the Abbé Rénaud had felt himself obliged to renounce this cherished hope after two or three conversations, in which the Irish lady displayed an enlightenment of mind and a firmness of principle which he felt rendered it useless for him to enter into an argument with her with any prospect of success.

However, the worthy man, forced to renounce his hopes in regard to Miss O'Neil, only applied himself more faithfully to that portion of Sibylle's education which was intrusted to him, and in this task, at least, he had the comfort of success. During the first year of his instructions he had confined himself to teaching her sacred history, reserving the doctrinal part for the second. The Oriental grandeur of the Old Testament histories, and the touching legends of the early saints and martyrs of the Christian era, awoke in Sibylle's imagination a religious fervor which gradually took the place of the poetical dreams of her childhood.

It was no longer golden-robed fairies, magic castles, and princely hunters, with which, in her fancy, she peopled the solitude of the woods, it was with pale hermits

and saintly shepherdesses; and above all it was the mysterious and imposing idea of God, his power and his goodness displayed in all the changes of nature, germinating with the plants, shining in the stars, and thundering in the storms, which elevated her thoughts and touched her heart.

The religious enthusiasm of the child sometimes, indeed, was carried to an extent which troubled both the curé and her grandparents. One cold winter day she gave away her cloak to a little beggar she met on the grounds, thereby making herself ill with a severe cold. At another time she tried in her childish way to imitate the austerities of the saints in the deserts. It was, however, always easy to bring back to the right path a mind of a high order like that of Sibylle, and a few sensible remonstrances soon moderated this excess of zeal.

About a year after the arrival of Miss O'Neil, the Marquis, an habitually early riser, was seated at his window enjoying the delicious air of a beautiful April morning, when he descried Sibylle alone on her way to the park.

"Where can Sibylle be going so early, my dear?" said M. de Férias to the Marchioness. "I did not know she was up. She appears as if she did not wish to be seen, and she is carrying a basket."

"I do not know what she is planning, my friend," said the Marchioness; "but for some days past she has had numerous conferences with

Jacques Féray. Yesterday she shut herself up in my room for two hours, and this morning she has borrowed my perfume-burner. That is all I know."

"We must follow her, my dear."

M. and Mme. de Férias could easily follow, on the gravel paths, the track of the footsteps of Sibylle, which led them, after a walk of a few minutes, to the opening of a glade, on the highest point of ground in the park. This site was justly celebrated for its beauty. It was surrounded by magnificent forest trees, and commanded a view of the sea, to which led a succession of gentle declivities covered with a brilliant verdure. In the midst of the glade stood a colossal oak-tree, and under the shade of its branches was one of those rare monuments left on the Norman coast by Celtic worshippers,—an enormous table of rough stone, which bore a singularly wild aspect, and looked like the contemporary of the tree.

M. and Mme. de Férias, as they approached the spot, suddenly stopped on hearing the voice of Sibylle some paces from them. The child was speaking in an animated and almost threatening manner; then she stopped, and an odor of incense could be perceived in the air. The Marquis and Marchioness, advancing a little farther, could now see Sibylle on her knees at the foot of the oak-tree, her eyes raised, and her lips moving as if in prayer. Against the trunk of the tree could be seen—the letters composed of wild violets interwoven—the word "God." On the

stone table was placed the perfume-burner, from which a light cloud of incense seemed to arise. At a little distance was the madman, Féray, kneeling against a tree and watching Sibylle with the downcast look of a hound that has been beaten. Mme. de Férias gazed at this scene with the tenderest emotion, but the Marquis with a serious and anxious expression.

Just then Sibylle observed their approach, and sprang to her feet, blushing like a rose.

"My child," said the old Marquis, pressing her to his heart, "this is well, but your altar needs a cross. We must remember the goodness of God as well as his power."

"That is true," said Sibylle. "I will put a cross on it."

"My darling," said Mme. de Férias, "did you make these beautiful letters of these flowers?"

"I made them," answered Sibylle, "but Jacques gathered the violets, and, do you believe, I cannot persuade him to pray with me. He is a monster." Sibylle accompanied this epithet with a frown, which appeared to affect Jacques Féray deeply. He cast down his haggard eyes, and said, timidly, "There is no good God!"

"Wretch!" cried Sibylle, and suddenly, taking him by the shoulders, she pushed him over. Then, seeing him stretched on the ground, in a frightened and awkward attitude, she rushed hastily into the woods, laughing merrily and shrugging her shoulders. "You great simpleton!" said she.

Jacques appeared delighted.

It was Sunday morning, and, according to their custom, the Férias family repaired, after breakfast, to the parish church. They arrived rather early, and found the chancel occupied only by the Beaumesnil family and the curé. Mme. de Beaumesnil, with an unusually important and busy air, was placing in front of the high altar a little table, on which reposed a wax figure with painted face, enamelled eyes, and curling hair, adorned with paper flowers and chenille ornaments. The curé, the chevalier Theodore, and Mlle. Constance contemplated this masterpiece with ravished eyes, and M. de Beaumesnil with an idiotic smile.

"What is this?" asked Sibylle, approaching with curiosity.

"My child," said Mme. de Beaumesnil, "it is a new figure of one of the blessed saints I have just had sent from Paris."

It was now the hour of service, and Sibylle took her place in the family pew; but the Marquis observed she did not pray with her accustomed fervor.

The congregation, during the ceremonies, directed many impatient glances towards the altar, accompanied by whispers and smiles. When the mass was over, their curiosity could no longer be restrained, and they tried to enter the chancel; but the chevalier Theodore kept back the crowd, and then, assuming the part of cicerone, he exhibited to them the graces and merits of the wax figure, and even caused it to open and shut its eyes by means of an ingeni-

ously contrived spring. The impressions produced upon the congregation were diverse; some of the men ridiculed the image and Mme. de Beaumesnil; but some old women, conceiving for it a sudden devotion, consecrated wax tapers in its honor. Mme. de Férias, importuned by Mme. de Beaumesnil, joined the ranks of these proselytes.

Sibylle, on her return to the castle, was unusually sad and silent. Had she been shocked by these unseemly familiarities with sacred things, so contrary to the solemn ideas she had formed of the greatness of the Deity and of the dignity of the worship due to him? Whatever were her thoughts she kept them to herself.

Meanwhile the time fixed for her first communion approached. The Abbé Rénaud then came every day to Férias, where he partook of the family dinner, and afterwards gave her a lesson on the catechism. One afternoon M. de Férias, who, a few moments before, had left his granddaughter in the room with the cure, was surprised to find her in the garden.

"Has the abbé gone so soon?" said he.

"No," answered Sibylle, briefly, "he is asleep."

"Does he often sleep in this way?" said the Marquis.

"Very often, after dinner."

"No matter," returned M. de Férias, gravely, "it was your duty to wait until he should awake. Neither your conduct nor manner show a proper respect."

It was not the first time M. de Férias had observed in Sibylle's manner towards the curé an appearance of irreverence, almost of contempt; and he also had noticed a change in the abbé, who appeared less cheerful than formerly. That day the Marquis questioned the curé on the subject.

"Are you satisfied with Sibylle, my friend?"

A slight flush rose to the cheeks of the poor priest.

"O yes, M. le Marquis; but you know the child has a great deal of sense."

"But does she make a good use of her sense, abbé?"

"Dear sir, if any one is to blame it is I. To enter the lists with so acute a mind, I should, doubtless, resume my theological studies, for I have become somewhat rusty by time."

"But does the child venture to argue with you?"

"It is true, sir; and to-day she has raised some objections which are really embarrassing."

"On what subject, my poor abbé?"

"On the subject of the mysteries of religion."

"But this is not natural. Can there be anything behind the scenes in this?"

"Really, monsieur, sometimes I cannot help thinking so."

"Could Miss O'Neil possibly exert any adverse influence over the mind of Sibylle?"

"Alas!" returned the abbé, "I know not what to think. Certainly Miss O'Neil, when she is present at

my instructions, conducts herself in the most satisfactory manner; and yet it is only too plain that I lose every day more and more the respect and confidence of the child."

"It may be," said the Marquis, "but this misfortune must not make us unjust. Follow me, abbé."

M. de Férias led the way towards the old oak-tree, where he knew at this hour he should find Sibylle and Miss O'Neil. The Marquis and the abbé, as they walked along, made up their minds that no idle scruples ought to prevent their overhearing the conversation between the teacher and her pupil. Concealed by the shrubbery, they could listen to them without being perceived. Miss O'Neil, seated on the Druid rock, was holding in her hands a celestial globe, of which she was explaining the mechanism to Sibylle, who was kneeling at her side. From time to time she raised her hand, as if to indicate different points of the horizon; but this lesson was nearly over, and she soon put down the globe. Then she detached from the trunk of the old tree some moss, which she gave Sibylle to examine, and explained to her the botanical structure of the plant in detail.

"My dear child," said Miss O'Neil, "I love to descend into these minute spheres of creation and there find the same hand of the great God who reigns among the stars. If sometimes I fear that the humble prayers of a weak creature like myself may not reach his mighty ear, I think of the blades of grass, in which the wonders of Providence can be seen even as

they are in the sun itself, and I take courage."

"I love God," said Sibylle.

"And he loves you, my dear."

"I do not know that," replied the child.

Miss O'Neil looked at her attentively.

"You have sad thoughts lately, Sibylle."

"Very sad, Miss O'Neil." And tears filled the poor child's eyes.

"And will you not tell them to me, my child?"

"You have forbidden me to speak to you of religion," said Sibylle, timidly.

"Yes, my dear. There are certainly some great religious truths, common to all thinking beings and above all human controversy, upon which I cannot but dwell, in the course of my instructions; but to discuss with you any special point of faith or doctrine would be a want, on my part, of duty, gratitude, and delicacy, in fact of common honesty, after my promise to your grandparents; and I never will do it. So we will no longer speak of your sorrows, since they are connected with religious subjects. But I do not understand this, my child, and I fear you do not evince on this point sufficient simplicity of heart and humility of mind. To a good child, it should be easy to adopt with confidence the religion of its parents; certainly of parents such as yours."

Sibylle bent down her head without answering. Miss O'Neil rose.

"Come, let us take a run in the woods, my dear," said she, smiling; "that is more suitable for your age than doctrinal discussions."

Sibylle kissed her, and they disappeared together under the trees.

"Well, abbé?" said M. de Férias, crossing his arms with a somewhat triumphant air, looking at his companion.

"Well, sir, it is clear that the difficulty does not arise here."

"On the contrary, you see, abbé, that Miss O'Neil comes to our aid. After such an assurance as we have received, to dismiss her would certainly be a great wrong."

"Assuredly, M. le Marquis. It is plain that it is my incompetence alone which causes the difficulty."

"No, no, my friend, it is not that. It is only some childish fancy, which will pass away."

The Marchioness, being consulted, did not ask for the dismissal of Miss O'Neil, but she proposed that they should send Sibylle alone to pass a few weeks with Mme. de Beaumesnil, where the curé might continue his lessons with the certainty of no counterbalancing influence. M. de Férias agreed to this plan. A fever which had broken out among some children living on the estate was to furnish a pretext to Miss O'Neil and Sibylle for the departure of the latter. Her wardrobe was prepared, and Mme. de Beaumesnil came in person to fetch her.

Any trifling event which disturbs the monotony of some existences is hailed as a blessing. So it was on



the occasion of Sibylle's visit in the Beaumesnil household. From the Chinese saloon, where M. de Beaumesnil smiled perpetually at the mandarins and the mandarins at him, even to the kitchen, where Mlle. Constance speedily announced the news, an air of gayety pervaded the mansion. The first idea of the chevalier Théodore on this great occasion was to visit the cellar, and to produce two bottles of old wine with which to drink the health of Mlle. Férias.

The dinner was soon announced, and the conversation at the table consisted of the gossip of the neighborhood. Mme. de Beaumesnil in general condemned most people, and did not approve of the rest. Not forgetful, however, of what she deemed her especial duty, she mingled with her discourse some instructive legends intended for the benefit of Sibylle, — stories of a little girl who, having neglected to say her prayers, was drawn out of bed in the night by the feet; and of a little boy who missed his catechism, and received punishment from an invisible hand. These fearful anecdotes, unfortunately, appeared to affect M. de Beaumesnil much more than they did Sibylle. Finally, at the dessert, the chevalier Théodore sang some songs, of which Sibylle only understood that he was fond of dancing on the green with the shepherdesses, which, in fact, he sometimes did after vespers. Becoming excited, he seized the hands of Sibylle and of his cousin Constance, and began to ex-

cute a sprightly step, which ended with his throwing down a pile of plates, and receiving, in consequence, the epithet of "stupid animal" from the lips of his affectionate sister.

Sibylle, who felt as if she had been shipwrecked amongst a tribe of cannibals, was only too happy when the hour came for her to retire to the little bedroom of her friend Clotilde. Burying her face in the pillows of her bed, she wept long and bitterly.

The next morning the Abbé Rénaud presented himself. The lesson took place in the garden, Mme. de Beaumesnil sitting near with her knitting. To the great satisfaction of the curé, the lesson passed without the child raising the smallest objection.

Mme. de Beaumesnil now organized in the Chinese saloon a little chapel, adorned with shells and devotional images, where the chevalier sang vespers as he was accustomed to sing them in the choir. Then Mme. de Beaumesnil or Constance would read aloud some devotional book, frequently stopping to scold the beggars who came into the courtyard. The books they selected were not of the number of those composed by the great men and the saints of the Church who have interpreted truth to the human mind in language worthy of their high subject. On the contrary, it was usually some mystical production, where all moral and religious truth was buried under the flowers of a refined symbolism.

Sometimes Sibylle, unable to catch the sense of this verbiage, would fall

asleep, and be suddenly awakened by the formidable voice of the chevalier beginning a chant, sustained by the contralto of Mme. de Beaumesnil and the falsetto of Mlle. Constance.

M. and Mme. de Férias came one day to dinner at the manor. Mme. de Beaumesnil informed them of the complete success of the experiment, and of the submission of Sibylle, and received in turn their affectionate thanks. Sibylle was surprised not to see Miss O'Neil with them, and her grandmother replying that a slight indisposition had kept her at home, Mme. de Beaumesnil thought it necessary to express her hopes that Miss O'Neil would not die of this sickness, since, if she did, she must go straight to hell. This painful proposition, accompanied by some words of compassion, caused Sibylle to open her eyes very wide indeed. Apparently she found it difficult to imagine Mme. de Beaumesnil, crowned with glory, among the number of the elect, while Miss O'Neil was to be plunged into the depths of the abyss.

One evening, as Sibylle was preparing for bed, Mme. de Beaumesnil observed round her neck a little medal her grandmother had given the child. She examined it, and said, "Take it off, my dear; I will give you a better one." Mme. de Beaumesnil had a large store of medals, and she now bestowed one of the handsomest ones on Sibylle.

"But I will keep my own, too," said the child.

"You may do so, but do not be surprised if yours should be changed

into lead; this sometimes happens when a medal is jealous of her sister."

"How of her sister! Of what sister?" cried the child, as if alarmed. "But, madame, there is only one Holy Virgin."

Mme. de Beaumesnil hesitatingly answered, "Certainly; but that is no matter. Come, stop chattering now, and get into bed and go to sleep."

Sibylle tried to sleep, but it was some time before the confusion of her ideas permitted her to do so.

After a visit of three weeks Sibylle became as silent and gentle as a dove, and was held up by her hostess as a pattern of exemplary conduct. Now, she declared, Mlle. de Férias was perfectly prepared for the holy duties of religion.

Great, therefore, was the surprise of the lady, when one morning, at the hour for the daily lesson on the catechism, Sibylle announced her determination not to take it; it was useless, she said, since she had decided not to make her first communion this year.

At this astounding declaration Mme. de Beaumesnil became as red as a peony, while a marble paleness overspread the features of the curé.

"And why, mademoiselle, if you please, do you not intend to make your first communion?" said Mme. de Beaumesnil in a hissing tone.

"I have ideas which do not permit me to do so, madame."

"What ideas? Come, will you speak?"

"I cannot tell them to you."

"Very well, mademoiselle. Ah, how I would punish you if I were your mother!"

"Happily, madame, you are not," said Sibylle.

Mme. de Beaumesnil rose from her seat. She could not annihilate her, so she retired.

Half an hour after this the Abbé Rénaud, accompanied by Sibylle, who had refused all explanation, entered the castle of Férias. The child went to her room, while the poor curé, wiping the tears from his eyes, presented himself in the saloon.

On learning the strange determination of their granddaughter, M. and Mme. de Férias were overwhelmed with grief. Their conscience, their tenderness, their pride, all were wounded, and Miss O'Neil, who was present, shared in their sorrow. Sibylle was called, and she came immediately. She was frightfully pale. As she went up to her grandfather to kiss him, the old man stopped her.

"My daughter," said he, "your carresses are ill-timed while you are breaking our hearts. I do not reproach you for your thoughts, they are not in your own power; but your want of confidence in us is unpardonable, and I am obliged to tell you that I have the right to insist upon an explanation."

While he was speaking Sibylle had gazed on him with a fixed look. She opened her lips as if to speak; then she became almost livid, and fell upon the floor. She was carried to her bed, and an attack of fever ensued. On opening her eyes she saw

the Marquis and Marchioness bending tenderly over her.

"My darling," said her grandfather, "I was wrong to press you so far. I doubt not but you are sorry to afflict us, and that your scruples arise from a too great tenderness of conscience. I trust God will remove these chimeras from your mind, and in the mean time I grant you full liberty in all that regards religion."

"How good you are!" said Sibylle. She passed her arm round the neck of the old man, drew his white head down on her pillow, and fell into a tranquil sleep.

M. de Férias, alarmed by the agitation of her young mind, had, in effect, resolved to respect these mysterious troubles, and even to remove for a while the apparent cause of her difficulties. From this time the lessons of the abbé were suspended. Miss O'Neil was directed to avoid in her instructions all exciting subjects, and the Marquis even went so far as to give Sibylle a dispensation for the time from joining in religious observances. The following Sunday there was spread throughout the church of Férias a feeling of pity mingled with blame when the Marquis and the Marchioness sorrowfully took their places in their accustomed seats, and between them was the empty place of their granddaughter.

With these exceptions, things at the castle resumed their usual course. M. and Mme. de Férias continued their tranquil and benevolent course of life. Sibylle and Miss O'Neil pursued their studies and took their

walks with their accustomed regularity. All went on as usual, excepting that the countenances of the two old people daily grew more sad, as if the tears shed in the night had made deeper wrinkles in their faces, and a dark circle appeared to extend itself under the eyes of the child, and her fair head seemed bowed as if by a heavy weight. Miss O'Neil, too, daily seemed to become more thin and angular. "Sir," said she to the Abbé Rénaud, who, like a true Christian, continued his frequent visits to the castle, "this unhappy enigma will wear us all out. I pray God to give us strength to endure it with patience."

## VII.

### THE BARK.

It was a Sunday in the early part of autumn. M. and Mme. de Férias were to dine at the parsonage, and their carriage was to be sent there for them after vespers. A little before the appointed hour the carriage appeared, and Sibylle got out; she had come to enjoy from the top of the cliff the sight of the effect of an unusually high tide, swelled by a violent storm which, during the previous night, had raged upon the coast. She climbed to the summit of a high rock, and there she found Jacques Féray seated on the ground, his head in his hands, gazing on the sea. Sibylle touched him on the shoulder; he looked up angrily; but seeing who it was, he gently moved, as if to make room for her, and she sat down beside

him. Below them raged the ocean, stormy and terrible; waves, mountain high, crested with foam, were dashing against the rocks; and the sighing of the wind mingled with the distant sounds of the chants proceeding from the church. A heavy autumn sky, over which rushed masses of dark clouds, added still more to the gloom and desolation of the scene.

After a few moments of silent contemplation, Sibylle took gently the hand of the madman, who turned and looked at her with anxious eyes.

"My poor Jacques," said she, "we are very unhappy."

Jacques Féray shook his head in sorrowful assent.

"God has forsaken us, my poor Jacques!"

Jacques looked at her as if greatly astonished.

"You too!" said he, in a low tone.

"Yes, he has forsaken me," said the child.

Jacques, without rising, turned towards the little church, at which he shook his fist, then, shrugging his shoulders, he resumed his former position; Sibylle, too, sank into a gloomy reverie.

She was suddenly roused by cries which proceeded from the little churchyard, and, rising, she saw a group of people standing on the church porch apparently in a state of great excitement. Their eyes were directed towards the ocean, and Sibylle soon ascertained the cause of their anxiety. It was a fisherman's bark which had just rounded the point of one of the rocks, and which

seemed to be struggling violently with the winds and waves. It had lost a portion of its rigging, and showed other signs of distress. Apparently the little vessel belonged to some neighboring port, being of a larger size than those usually anchored in the little harbor of Férias.

The intelligence soon caused the little church to be deserted, and a crowd of people, amongst whom was seen the curé himself, still wearing his priestly robes, rushed to the edge of the cliff to watch the motions of the bark. They could distinctly descry the forms of three or four men, some endeavoring to adjust the remnants of the sails that were still left, others throwing overboard the cargo to lighten the vessel. They could even hear their cries of distress, and M. de Férias and the curé, greatly moved at the sight of their misery, entreated the village fishermen to put out to their rescue; but the most liberal offers could not induce them to consent; they said no boat could live in such a sea, and that, although they pitied the poor strangers, they were not willing to risk their own lives for them.

For more than half an hour the bark had been laboring to round a point of rock, and at last she appeared to have succeeded, and shouts of joy arose among the crowd; but these were soon changed into cries of terror and pity as the bark was dashed violently back on the edge of the rocks. She rose with the wave, and was then thrown suddenly on her side, from which she did not right

herself; and it seemed as if every succeeding wave must dash her to pieces and sweep off the unfortunate human beings who clung to her deck and masts, with only this frail refuge from the boiling torrent which divided them on one side from the land, and the boundless depths of the ocean on the other. A shuddering silence fell upon the crowd assembled on the cliff, only broken by the sobs of the women. Suddenly one of them cried out, "The curé."

The crowd murmured their approval; the men took off their hats, and all knelt down. Sibylle, who had followed with all the ardor of her soul every detail of the scene, was astonished to see the imposing character of the expression which had spread itself over the countenance of the priest. He had mounted a high point of rock; his gray hair waved in the wind, and his pale face, raised towards heaven, wore an almost sublime expression of sadness and of faith. He raised one hand in the direction of the shipwrecked men, and said, in a slightly tremulous but distinct tone, "You who are about to die, — whom I do not know, but who are known to God, — I give you absolution in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." Having pronounced these words, he knelt down, and for some moments appeared absorbed in prayer. When he arose from his knees, he saw that the bark still resisted the action of the waves, although fearfully convulsed by the repeated shocks. "But," said he, "God

grants them a respite; can we do nothing for them? Are you quite sure, my friends?"

A negative murmur was the answer.

"At least," said he, "we might make some effort. My friends, come with me to the beach. We can see better there. Really, this sight is unbearable."

Hastily taking off his priestly robes, he rapidly descended the path which led to the shore, followed by the crowd.

M. de Férias, who had more than once endeavored to induce Sibylle to leave this painful scene, now insisted on her returning to the castle; but she entreated him to allow her to remain, and follow the people to the edge of the water.

From that point the aspect of the sea was even more terrific; but the brave curé, looking on the sinking bark, announced his determination to go to her rescue.

"I will go alone, if I must," said he, "but I will go"; and, before any attempt could be made to stop him, he jumped into one of the boats moored at the quay. This action caused great agitation among the crowd. Amongst the spectators was an old fisherman who had hitherto shown but little emotion, — in fact, had displayed a cool indifference; he was considered the most experienced sailor in the village, and when his opinion had been asked, he had only shrugged his shoulders without deigning to reply. Now the old man stopped pacing up and down, took

his pipe from his mouth, and, shaking out the ashes, put it into his pocket.

"Since the curé risks his life," said he, "I risk mine."

He then jumped into the boat, and began to unfasten her; but this action had excited an impulse of generous sympathy among the crowd, and several sailors, regardless of the entreaties of their wives, rushed forwards, crying out, "I will go!"

The old fisherman replied, "Three more besides the curé and myself will be sufficient."

Three men immediately took the oars, while the old fisherman placed himself at the helm, and the boat pushed off. For some moments, in the comparatively calm waters of the little basin, she rose and sank with a sort of regularity of motion, but soon after she had passed the pier she became violently agitated, now rising on the top of a crested wave, now sinking into an abyss of waters; and, as night was rapidly approaching, the anxious crowd soon lost sight of her altogether in the darkness of the fog.

The general anxiety, now heightened by doubts and conjectures, rose to intensity almost unbearable, and several women were carried away fainting. M. and Mme. de Férias at first refused to yield to the entreaties of Sibylle to be allowed to remain longer; but they consented when she said to them, "Let me stay to the last, and to-night I will tell you everything. I will no longer have any secrets from you."

In the midst, even, of events so

distressing, these words were welcomed by the Marquis and Marchioness; so, wrapping the child in shawls and furs, they allowed her to remain.

After an hour and a half of the most intense dread and expectation, a sailor on the watch heard a sound which he declared was that of the boat, and shortly afterwards it was seen approaching in the dim light.

When it reached the quay, the delight of the spectators rose almost to frenzy; they embraced each other, they danced wildly around. A fire was hastily kindled on the beach, and by its light soon a man was seen to jump from the boat and turn to assist another, who was the curé. The good man, wet, chilled, and overcome by fatigue, could scarcely stand. He was carried towards the fire, and seated on a piece of wreck, while the crowd surrounded him, trying to kiss his hands, and even his clothes. In a faint voice he murmured, "My friends, my good friends!" and he fainted.

When in a few moments he came to himself, the first object that met his eyes was the lovely face of Sibylle, seen by the light of the fire, her beaming eyes fixed on him with an ecstatic expression. When she saw that he recognized her, she sprang towards him, put her arms round him, and said, "My good curé, how I love you!"

To the heart of the old priest it was as if an angel had descended and said to him, "God is pleased with you!"

M. and Mme. de Férias, having satisfied themselves that the shipwrecked mariners, who, happily, had all been saved, would receive in the village all the care necessary in their condition, took the curé in their carriage to the parsonage, and then returned to the castle with Sibylle.

"My child," said M. de Férias, as they descended from the carriage, "you are fatigued now, shall we wait till to-morrow to hear what you have to tell us?"

"O no," said she, "you have already waited too long, immediately."

A fire was kindled in the boudoir of the Marchioness, and Sibylle, seated at the feet of the two old people, opened her heart. The reader has probably already divined the truth. Sibylle had been wounded in feelings of religious enthusiasm by the puerilities of a narrow-minded devotion; her taste had been shocked and her judgment offended by ill-chosen expressions and unbecoming practices, so that she had come to doubt whether the religion of her parents, and especially the religion of Mme. de Beaumesnil, were worth that of Miss O'Neil; and when this idea had once entered her mind, she could not forget it. She had been so unhappy she could have wished to die. She then acknowledged, that the sometimes common manners of the curé had displeased her, and that his appearance had contrasted painfully in her eyes with her ideal of a priest and apostle; but that evening, she said,

the Abbé Rénaud had appeared to her as if transfigured. At the moment when he had invoked upon the shipwrecked mariners the absolution of Heaven, and when he had rushed alone to their rescue, she had comprehended that only a sincere faith and a devoted love of God could inspire such actions, and that her belief was now firmly fixed in the religion of her forefathers.

The Marquis and Marchioness listened to her with a feeling of inexpressible relief.

"My darling," said M. de Férias to her when she had finished, — until then he had only interrupted her by caresses and smiles, — "my darling, you always wish to ride the swan; you ask for the impossible, and I fear it may be the difficulty of your life. You now bring to the search after truth, and I fear you may one day bring to the search after happiness, an ideal of perfection which is truly elevated, but which it will be difficult to realize. Remember, my child, that religion practised perfectly would be heaven itself; but we are on the earth, and the worship of men can be but imperfect. Therefore, my Sibylle, do not regard their weakness and ignorance as crimes. I too, my daughter, am far from approving all the forms in which devotion manifests itself; some are not to be praised, and others much to be condemned. In my eyes, also, these trivial practices, these superstitious exaggerations, profane the pure altars of religion. But my age is more tolerant than yours; when you are

older you will have more indulgence, more justice; you will pardon much to sincere hearts, you will even pardon their superstition, since it is at least an homage to truth. And now, my daughter, go to sleep, and enjoy yourself the peace and happiness you have restored to our hearts."

## VIII.

### THE PARSONAGE.

THE following morning the sun shone brightly on the hills and heaths as M. and Mme. de Férias drove at an early hour to the village, to visit the shipwrecked sailors. On their way they left Sibylle before the gate of a little garden not far from the church. Through the vines of clematis and honeysuckle could be seen a small house with flower-beds in front. Sibylle rang the bell, and the curé himself opened the door. His sleeves were partially rolled up, and he had in his hand a spade, which he dropped at the sight of Sibylle.

"Is it you, my dear young lady?" said he.

"Yes, my father, I have come to take my lesson in the catechism."

The curé's eyes filled with tears. "Is it possible?" said he, "Come in, my dear child."

Then, suddenly remembering that his hands were stained from his work, he called out. "Marianne! quick, bring me some water."

The old woman came, apparently not in the best of humors.



"Mademoiselle," said she, ironically, after saluting Sibylle, "does he not look well this morning, after his pranks and his follies? He has the complexion of a corpse."

"Bah!" replied the curé, gayly; "on the contrary, I am as fresh as a rose."

"Much like a rose!" said Marianne, in a grumbling tone, as she retired.

The abbé laughed, and seated Sibylle near him, on a bench shaded by a large fig-tree. She immediately put into his hands her catechism, which she had brought with her.

"But, my child, will you first explain to me by what miracle you have returned to me?"

"You worked the miracle yourself, my father. Since last evening I regard you as a saint."

"O my dear child!" said the old man, blushing.

She then related to him her impressions of the previous night, and while she was speaking the abbé frequently applied his large red handkerchief to his eyes.

"But will you tell me," said he, "what was the cause of your alienation from the faith?"

Sibylle told him, but she did not speak on this point with the same frankness. She spoke a little vaguely of the practices and the speeches which had shocked her. She named the Beaumesnil family and other bigots of their stamp; then she stopped short, and cast down her eyes.

"Come, my daughter," said the

curé, kindly, "go on. It is my turn, now. I beg you to continue."

Thus urged, Sibylle confessed to him the causes which had separated her from him. For her, she said, a priest was a sacred, mysterious personage, above human weaknesses, occupied with saintly meditations, placed on the steps of the altar, between God and man. She would wish him only to appear in the church, under the cloud of incense, and to spend the remainder of his time in visiting the poor and the sick. It was difficult for her to feel proper reverence for a man whom she habitually saw eating and drinking, playing games, and reading newspapers. Besides, she thought, in this familiar intercourse with his parishioners, sometimes the priest appeared their social inferior, instead of their spiritual superior; and that he was, thereby, led to tolerate practices and expressions he would otherwise have reprovved. In short, these circumstances had led her into a wrong and unjust estimate of his character; but the events of the previous evening had opened her eyes. She asked his pardon for having misunderstood him, and assured him that henceforward nothing could ever diminish her respect and affection for him.

During this explanation, of which we have given only the substance, the countenance of the Abbé Rénaud had assumed a grave and anxious, even a sad, expression. His intellect, slow but not weak, appeared to receive a new light, which partly dazzled him. In the tenderness of his

conscience he rather exaggerated than excused his shortcomings, and, reviewing in his mind the course of his pastoral career, he asked himself whether the lukewarm feelings of many of his flock might not have been caused by his failures in duty, by which he had compromised the prestige and effect of his authority in sacred things. He resolved in his heart that he would do all in his power to repair his negligence, that he would shake off his habits of indolence, fortify his mind by study and meditation, and purify his life by self-denial. These worthy resolutions lent to his features and to the tones of his voice a touching dignity, when, after a few moments of silent reflection, he answered Sibylle thus: "I thank you, my daughter. I am no longer young, but at any age we can become better, and, by the help of God, I will do so."

Sibylle's ideal of the priestly life and character was not altogether a new one to the Abbé Rénaud. He could look back to the days of his youth, when similar noble aspirations had filled his heart, but he had gradually allowed himself, by giving way to his constitutional defects, to take a lower standard; but it needed only an exceptional circumstance like this to rekindle in his soul the flame of devotion; and the old man, habitually timid and loving his ease, still had in him the elements of the martyr.

It was, indeed, a cold and patient martyrdom, recurring every day and hour, to which he devoted himself.

Already Sibylle could observe in his language and manner something of the higher tone which she had desired, as also in the lesson which followed their explanation.

The Marquis and Marchioness now arrived, and interchanged warm congratulations with the curé. These were interrupted by the loud ringing of the bell of the gate, and Mme. de Beaumesnil appeared, carrying an enormous bouquet of artificial flowers. After friendly salutations, she demanded from the abbé the key of the church, in order to place her flowers upon the altar.

"Madame," he replied, "if you will allow me, I will myself place them on the altar. It appears to me more proper."

Mme. de Beaumesnil looked at him as if petrified; she had been accustomed to be so busy in the church, dusting, ornamenting, and arranging, that she could not understand this, and answered in a sharp tone, "My dear abbé, do you wish me no longer to employ myself in the decoration of the church?"

"All that you give me for that purpose, madame, I will receive most gratefully; but, if you will reflect as I have reflected on this subject, you will see that the dignity of worship suffers by too great familiarity with sacred things. The altar should be my care alone; give me your flowers, and I will offer them in your name."

Madame de Beaumesnil flourished her bouquet indignantly, and, instead of handing it to the curé, went towards the well and threw it down. After

this exploit, she fell on a bench and burst into tears. They tried to calm her, and she yielded to the affectionate remonstrances of the curé, and even ended by asking him to dinner; but he refused, as he had also declined the invitation of the Marquis, giving for a reason the state of his health.

In his parsonage the abbé sat down to his lonely repast, which was extremely meagre, and even refused the cup of coffee which the faithful Marianne brought at the close of the meal.

During the weeks and months which followed, the Abbé Rénaud continued, both at home and abroad, to follow the system he had laid down for himself. He shut himself up a great deal in his parsonage, and it was known that he led there the self-denying life of an anchorite. He discontinued his habit of familiar visits, and although this was at first a matter of complaint in the parish, the consequence was a kind of solemnity and reverence attached to his presence when he did appear. Besides the increase of public respect, he gained the great advantage of a perfect independence. He allowed no interference in matters relating to the church, and reformed many abuses which had crept in. Amongst these was the manner in which the chevalier Théodore Desrozais was in the habit of singing in the choir, where he had been accustomed to indulge in a familiarity far from becoming; even going sometimes so far as to amuse the audience by looks and words. The curé had always

disliked this license, and now, finding that some serious reproofs were not sufficient to stop it, he ended by forbidding the chevalier to take part in the singing. This measure, added to some other pastoral admonitions, so exasperated the chevalier that the following Sunday he absented himself from church, and sent word to the curé that he had borrowed from the judge the works of Voltaire. After a few weeks, however, of these philosophical studies, an attack of gout brought him to a better state of mind; he sent back Voltaire to the judge, and requested a visit from the curé, who lost no time in complying with his wish. The reconciliation between the frivolous old chevalier and his pastor was sincere, for at heart he was not a bad man; but this incident increased the resentment which Mme. de Beaumesnil had entertained against the curé ever since the affair of the bouquet, and she endeavored in every way to undermine his influence in the parish, but without success.

The knowledge, however, of her machinations, in addition to the increased labor and the rigor of the ascetic life now led by the Abbé Rénaud, produced a visible alteration in the health and spirits of the good old man. Sibylle grew uneasy when she saw him begin to assume the physical appearance of those legendary saints whose virtues she had admired. She consulted, by the advice of her grandparents, his faithful servant Marianne, whose accounts did not tend to reassure her.

One day, as the curé was finishing his hermit-like repast, he perceived in the apartment an aroma now become unusual to him, and, at the same time, Marianne placed before him a steaming cup of coffee.

"But, Marianne," said he, "you know very well I have left off drinking coffee."

"Bah!" said the old woman, with a grimace; "when you know who has prepared this coffee, I will answer for it you will take it."

"What do you mean?" said the surprised curé.

The smiling apparition of Sibylle in the doorway of the room explained the mystery.

From that time the Abbé Rénaud observed an extraordinary development of culinary talent in Marianne, for, without any increased expenditure, the dishes she placed before

him were much more nourishing and palatable.

He complimented her on the improvement; she only shrugged her shoulders without making any answer.

Meanwhile the course of religious instruction Sibylle had been receiving drew to a close.

Her first communion took place on the first of May; the weather was mild and lovely.

Jacques Féray stationed himself in the churchyard to see Sibylle pass, all in white, like a daisy in fresh bloom. She smiled on him as she passed, and, for the first time in fifteen years, Jacques Féray stepped over the threshold of the church; he remained near the door, but listened attentively throughout the ceremony, and towards the close, thinking doubtless of his little dead daughter, now an angel in heaven, he shed tears.

## PART II.

### I.

#### CLOTILDE.

WE shall not pause long over the three or four years which succeeded Sibylle's first communion. They were spent in perfect peace for herself, and for all those by whom she was surrounded. Her talents for study, for music, for painting, were cultivated to the greatest advantage by Miss O'Neil, and her grandparents were delighted with the results. Her

mind, also, as it was developed by time and experience, lost somewhat of that character of severity which had been the defect of her childhood. The womanly heart was now beginning to beat within her, as shown by her more gentle and tender manner.

The influence of Sibylle over the mind of the curé still continued. Mlle. de Férias could now sometimes smile herself at the excess of her former zeal. Instead of urging the old man to the path of an ascetic

life, she frequently employed innocent stratagems to induce him to abate something of the rigor of his solitude and his abstinence.

Still, on all points which appeared to her essential to the dignity of religion, she continued inflexible, and the docility with which the Abbé Rénaud followed her advice on these subjects was frequently a matter of amusement to M. de Férias in his conversations with the Marchioness. "My dear," he would say, laughingly, "she is a spiritualist, and she wants to spiritualize all the parish."

And, indeed, in consequence of the suggestions of Sibylle and the praiseworthy efforts of the abbé, the worship in the parish of Férias was conducted with an unusual purity and dignity, by which the authority of the doctrine was confirmed and established.

About this time Sibylle had the pleasure of making the acquaintance of the Countess de Vergnes, her maternal grandmother. The Count de Vergnes, twice since the birth of his granddaughter, had had the courage to tear himself away from his Parisian life to come and pass three or four days at Férias. Sibylle, therefore, knew him well, and she was fond of him, for he was kind and amiable, and, besides, her recollection of him was associated in her mind with bonbons, magnificent dolls, and beautiful pearl necklaces; but she regretted never to see him accompanied by her grandmother De Vergnes, who, under the pretext of her exquisite sensibility, had delayed her visit from

year to year. When, however, she did at last arrive she appeared to bear the meeting with equanimity, and, turning to her maid, said, "See, Julie, I was just so at fifteen. I feel quite overcome." And she embraced Sibylle with some appearance of a tear.

For the first twenty-four hours one might have imagined Mme. de Vergnes was tempted to take up her abode at Férias, so delighted did she appear to be with the country; the woods, the sea, the meadows, the singing of the birds,—all threw her into a state of ecstasy. "Ah!" said she to her hosts, "how happy you are to be able to live here! You do not realize your happiness. This calm, this silence, and then the sound of the wind among the trees, and the sight of the cattle feeding at a distance! And these little pheasants, these little yellow creatures running after their mother! 'Not pheasants? chickens,' do you say? O, how interesting it all is! Yes, this is the true life! Nature,—the country! Ah, you are indeed happy to live here!"

Nevertheless, the third morning after her arrival, Mme. de Vergnes confided to the discreet Julie that she had not closed her eyes the night before. "Really," said she, "I cannot conceive how they are able to sleep in this country. I am not used to these noises. These birds, who begin to chatter from the break of day! Certainly, I love the singing of birds; but then there is a time for everything! And then the sheep

bleating, and the cattle lowing! One might fancy one's self in the ark! And then, nothing but green forever before one's eyes! It is enough to disgust one with green! I believe I am turning green myself! Give me my little hand-glass, my good Julie. It is no wonder, indeed, after such a night!"

At last, on the fourth day, Mme. de Vergnes received a letter which recalled her in haste to Paris. She expressed her bitter regret, and at midday took her departure. "My dear child," said she, as she took leave of her granddaughter, "we must keep up our spirits; we will not have a scene. Soon you, also, must quit this paradise to come to the city. Such is life! Adieu, my dear child, adieu!"

Sibylle's strength of mind appeared sufficient to sustain her under the grief of this distressing separation; at any rate, she had now the consolation of the society of her old friend, Clotilde Desrozaïs, who had, some time before, returned home from her convent life. She had amply realized the promise of her childhood. She was tall, willowy, graceful. She had heavy masses of beautiful black hair, which she braided, twisted, curled, or wove into a diadem for her beautifully shaped head. Her arms, her hands, her shoulders, white as marble, seemed modelled after the antique. Under her somewhat heavy eyelids her velvet-black eyes shone with a brilliant light. As to her character, Clotilde seemed, indeed, greatly improved; the noisy,

obstinate, turbulent child appeared transformed into a timid, modest young person, speaking little and in a low tone, obliging and ready for everything; in fact, a model young lady.

Sibylle was delighted with this change; she became very fond of Clotilde, and an almost daily intercourse was established between them. Sibylle was enthusiastic about her friend's beauty; she loved to dress her as a druidess, a Roman lady, a Jewess, a Circassian; and then to draw or paint her in these various costumes, saying, in her artistic enthusiasm, "No, you are too beautiful, you are frightfully beautiful, ridiculously beautiful."

Clotilde appeared to share all the favorite tastes and pursuits of Mlle. de Férias, and made herself the echo of her ideas, her dreams, her opinions; for she had a fund of passionate emotion always ready to expend itself upon something, and sometimes the ardor of her aspirations towards excellence appeared to surpass even that of Sibylle.

In their familiar intercourse, Sibylle could not but remark that, when they happened to touch upon any sentimental subject, Mlle. Desrozaïs immediately would assume an attitude of profound melancholy, of deep despair. She inquired the reason of all this.

"You are too young to understand, my dear!" replied Mlle. Desrozaïs, shaking her head and sighing deeply.

This answer, as may be imagined, only the more excited the curiosity of Sibylle, who, guessing a romance

in the history of her friend, entreated her to honor her immediately with her confidence. Clotilde at first refused ; but, at length, after making Sibylle swear to a profound secrecy, "My dear," said she, "I never shall marry."

"Is it possible?" said Sibylle, drawing nearer, with redoubled interest.

"Yes, it is certain," returned Mlle. Desrozaïs ; "for I love some one, and he whom I love and by whom I am beloved cannot marry me ; circumstances separate us forever."

"Dreadful !" cried Sibylle ; "but what is the reason ? Where did you meet him ? What is his name ?"

"I can tell you only his Christian name ; it is Raoul. Why do you blush ?"

At this name of Raoul, Sibylle had, indeed, suddenly blushed deeply.

"Why do you blush ?" repeated Clotilde, quickly ; "do you know any one named Raoul ? Answer me."

"I blush because you speak of things which interest me. Where could I have known your Raoul ?"

"Yes, you certainly cannot know him. Well, my dear, he had a cousin in the convent, whom he used frequently to come and see with his mother. His appearance interested me at once. I must tell you he was not a very young man, so that I imagined myself alone in my admiration of him, and did not suppose the other young ladies had remarked him. I was undeceived, however ; one day we wanted to play at some game ; one of the young ladies proposed that each of us should write on a piece of

paper the name of the young man among the number of those in the habit of coming to the convent whom she would choose to marry, and afterwards that these names should be read aloud."

"It was a singular game," said Sibylle.

"It was as good as any other. Well, we decided to play this game. Each wrote a name upon a piece of paper, and put it into a basket. Well, when the slips of paper were read aloud, they all contained the same name, — Raoul !"

"It was singular," replied Sibylle, coldly.

"I saw, therefore, that I was not alone in my opinion of him. Some days afterwards, my dear, I happened to meet him in the parlor, and I observed he looked a great deal at me. His cousin, who was a friend of mine, suddenly rose, and, coming across the room to the place where I was standing, said to me, hastily, 'Do not stir for a few moments.' I then saw he had a portfolio on his knee, and that he was sketching. I must tell you he paints beautifully. When he had finished, he made an inclination of the head, and thanked me with his eyes in the most graceful manner. As I went out of the room I dropped a pair of gloves I held in my hand. He picked them up, seemed to hesitate, and at last, instead of returning them to me, he put them in his pocket, at the same time fixing his eyes upon mine with an expression so deep and touching that my heart almost stopped beating,

and I felt that from that time we were bound together for life."

"Is that all?" asked Sibylle.

"Certainly. Is anything more necessary? Have I not told you we are bound for life?"

"I think not," said Sibylle.

"You child!" returned Mlle. Desrozaïs. "Know, then, that a week afterwards my friend informed me, with an air of mystery, that her cousin, urged by his family to form a marriage with a young girl of noble birth, and very beautiful and rich, had suddenly gone away to travel in Persia. It was suspected, added my friend, with a malicious glance,—for in reality, she did not love me so much as I had supposed,—that he had conceived a fancy for a person without birth or fortune. Is it not clear now? Poor Raoul—it was for me—had braved the hardships of exile, perhaps of danger; for sometimes those who go to those distant lands never return. Well, you may laugh at me, Sibylle, but I consider myself as his widow, and I often weep over the sad fate that separates us."

A few charming tears accompanied the last words of Clotilde, and Sibylle, quite convinced, kissed them away, and tried to console her.

This confidential conversation between the young girls had taken place in one of the most remote and retired avenues of the park. They were suddenly surprised at hearing the sound of voices near them, and almost at the same time a hunting-dog ran towards the bench where

they were sitting, and seemed desirous of making their acquaintance.

"Who can be coming?" said Clotilde, hastily rising; "whose can this beautiful dog be?"

Just then the Marquis and Marchioness of Férias appeared in sight, accompanied by a strange lady, no longer young, and by a young man with light hair and a slender figure, elegantly dressed, and who was twisting a riding-whip in his lilac-gloved hands. At this apparition the inconsolable widow of poor Raoul passed her hand rapidly over her tearful eyes, her curls, her plaits, her skirts, and in two seconds she was equipped for the combat.

"Ah!" said Sibylle, quietly, "these are probably the Val-Chenays. My grandmother has been expecting them."

Sibylle had now attained her sixteenth year, and her future interests seemed to require that before long should take place her introduction to the world, and to Parisian life. M. and Mme. de Férias, although they had made up their minds to the sacrifice of parting with her, still felt deeply the hardship of it. The only way of preventing a separation, probably a lifelong one for them, was to form for their granddaughter an alliance and establishment in their own neighborhood; but, after some inquiries in the narrow circle to which their retired life confined them, they had renounced this vague idea, which also, it appeared to them, might be prompted by a selfish motive.



However, a friend, who was the confidant of their sorrowful feelings on this point, had also made some inquiries. It was the bishop of —, who took a lively interest in the welfare of Sibylle, and who one day announced to the Marquis that he had found for her a husband who appeared to him a phoenix.

"I have been searching for this rare bird," wrote he, "throughout my diocese, during my pastoral visitations, and lo! I have found it at my own door. It is the young Baron de Val-Chesnay, last representative of the Val-Chesnay Mérimville, a name not equal to your own, my Lord Marquis, but still a very good one. His fortune is immense, at least equal to that of your granddaughter. Roland is a handsome young man, hardly twenty-four years old, but that is a good fault; and then, Mlle. de Férias is young, and there is no haste. His mother is a saint, not an eagle in mind, but a saint. She has brought up her son, under her own wing, in the best of principles; she has never left him. She is now in precisely the same dilemma as yourselves; she fears not to be able to marry her son in the neighborhood, and she trembles at the idea of his plunging into the vortex of Parisian life. As for the young man, I will not say too much about him personally, but certainly he appears very well. Indeed, I think I have made a fortunate discovery."

M. and Mme. de Férias received this welcome communication with delight. A few days after they were

introduced to Madame de Val-Chesnay and her son in the drawing-room of the episcopal palace. The two mothers, both feeling the same anxieties, soon became cordial and confidential, and before they parted the Val-Chesnays had accepted an invitation to pass a week or two at the castle of Férias, in order that the two young persons might be made acquainted, and that it might be seen whether their own hearts would lead them towards the fulfilment of the wishes of their relatives.

During these preliminary negotiations, M. and Mme. de Férias had taken the greatest possible pains to conceal from Sibylle all knowledge of these delicate negotiations; they had used a plausible pretext for their visit to the Val-Chesnays, of whom Sibylle had heard them speak, but whom she had never seen. Distrusting themselves on account of their great personal interest in the result of this affair, they resolved not to influence their granddaughter in any way by their own opinion. Sibylle was far from suspecting anything, for the idea of marriage had never presented itself to her mind, excepting as a termination to a residence, more or less prolonged, at the Hotel de Vergnes. It was therefore only with a certain curiosity, but with a perfect serenity, that Mlle. de Férias saw appear on her hereditary domains the young man who advanced towards her with the riding-whip in his hand. The young Baron, apparently better instructed than herself, blushed slightly as he saluted

her, and Mme. de Val-Chesnay, after examining her with a maternal eye, received her with a warmth of manner which appeared singular to Sibylle.

At the termination of a walk in which Mlle. de Férias took pains to lead the way towards the most interesting sites of the park, they visited the hothouses and the fairy-like poultry-yard. During these explorations, the gentle gayety, the animated conversation of Sibylle, the simplicity and taste with which she pointed out the beauties of the place, entirely gained her the heart of the old lady, who occasionally cast on her son glances of happiness and triumph. M. and Mme. de Férias, too, seeing the favorable impression made by their granddaughter, were also delighted. The young Baron himself, whose appearance was *distingué*, but cold and phlegmatic, gave evident signs of satisfaction, but he would have considered it beneath his dignity to manifest an unconventional enthusiasm.

A faint smile spread itself over his lips, which he sometimes deigned to open, in order to let fall, like morsels of ice, the words, "Charming! delicious! ideal!"

Clotilde alone seemed left out of this happy group; she followed some steps behind, sometimes caressing the dog of the Baron, sometimes appearing plunged into a deep melancholy, although none of the furtive glances which her striking beauty attracted from the imperturbable young man were lost upon her. Mlle. Desrozais

dined at the castle with her aunt. After dinner the two young friends went into the library, which was also a studio. Sibylle immediately began to draw something on a piece of tinted paper, replying with vague words of assent to the unmeasured praises bestowed by Clotilde upon the new guests.

"But, seriously now, my dear," said Clotilde, after a silent pause, "what do you think of him?"

"M. de Val-Chesnay? O, charming! delicious! ideal!" replied Sibylle, with a droll imitation of the Baron.

"Do not deceive yourself, my dear," said Clotilde; "he is a husband for you."

Sibylle opened her eyes very wide, then burst out laughing.

"Bah!" said she, "what folly! see, it is finished." And, presenting to Clotilde the sketch she had hastily made, "See!" said she; "here he is, my husband!"

It was in reality impossible to mistake M. de Val-Chesnay, with his blonde whiskers and hair falling over his shoulders, a marked line dividing the top of his head, a collar of a metallic stiffness, and a blue cravat covered with immense round spots. This absurd head was supported by a body faintly traced, but from which appeared an enormous pair of lilac gloves, and the lower limbs were in the stiffest possible of positions. Clotilde, on seeing this grotesque image, was convulsed with laughter.

As soon as she could speak, "Do give it to me, I beg of you," said she.

"Take it, then," said Sibylle.

"Thank you, my good little Sibylle."

Meanwhile Miss O'Neil had been exhibiting to Mme. de Val-Chesnay some paintings of her pupil, which the Baroness admired enthusiastically, and the young Roland uttered from the height of his necktie the epithet "masterly." When Sibylle returned to the drawing-room, she was entreated to fill up the measure of delight by executing something for them on the harp, which M. Roland de Val-Chesnay, a little more expansive after dinner, qualified as "ideal,—not only," he said, "on account of its beauty of form, but because, when well played, it was really a charming instrument."

It would have been difficult to resist entreaties so eloquent as these, and Mlle. de Férias did not resist.

At her harp Sibylle looked really lovely. She was dressed that evening in white, with wide falling sleeves. Her graceful figure, her beautifully shaped head with its crown of golden tresses, her eyes so full of depth and expression, gave her an almost seraphic appearance. The word "angel" seemed not inapplicable in looking at her. However, the character of her beauty, rather intellectual than physical, was not exactly the kind to impress a mind so little æsthetic as was that of the last of the Val-Chesnays. When Sibylle had finished he gently applauded the performance with his lilac gloves, and thought, in his heart, that his *fiancée* was rather thin. Im-

mediately afterwards, Sibylle, who not been satisfied with seeing her friend Clotilde all day in the background, begged her to sit down to the piano. Clotilde, after a little pressing, consented. She took off her gloves with an absent air, waved for an instant her magnificent arms under the whiskers of the young Baron, who was near the piano, and, after running a few chords, began, in a fine contralto voice, to sing an air of Donizetti, — *O mon Fernand !* — in which she excelled. She sang it, indeed, and especially that evening, with an accent of passionate melancholy, the effect of which was greatly heightened by her expressive paleness, her deep, swimming eyes, her quivering nostril, the graceful bend of her beautiful figure. The effect was not lost upon M. de Val-Chesnay, who, standing in front of her and behind the piano, received a liberal portion of the glances addressed to the imaginary Spaniard. Never before had the young man been exposed to such a battery of looks. Clotilde ceased to sing, but his cold gray eye was still fixed upon her, and his half-opened mouth and bending attitude showed that, for the moment, he had really forgotten himself and conventional observances. He could not find words to compliment Mlle. Desrozais, notwithstanding the real pleasure she had given him ; but he hastily took off his gloves, in order to help her look for a piece of music in a portfolio. It was not surprising if, in the course of the search, he happened to touch her hand.

It would be a mistake to suppose that, when Mlle. Desrozaïs was displaying all her powers of fascination to attract M. de Val-Chesnay, she had formed any deliberate plan of usurping the heart and hand she saw were intended for Sibylle. So bold a scheme could not originate so suddenly, even in a mind as enterprising as hers; but there are women, and, indeed, some women charming in other respects, who can never see even a man to whom they are perfectly indifferent interested in another woman without feeling an irresistible impulse towards conquest. This jealous instinct, peculiar to the sex, in passionate and ill-regulated natures becomes almost satanic. Clotilde had only followed the inspiration natural to her, and for the moment had no particular aim, excepting to wound her dearest friend by attracting to herself the admiration of the man who, as she believed, was destined to become her *fiancé*. But soon the great success of her manoeuvres, the simplicity and awkward delight of the young Roland, suggested to this clever young lady more serious and deliberate ideas.

Half an hour afterwards, as Mme. de Beaumesnil and her niece walked silently towards home on a shady path, Clotilde suddenly said, "Aunt, what is the fortune of the Val-Chesnays?"

"I do not know, but it is enormous," said the aunt.

Clotilde sighed deeply.

"My dear," returned Mme. de Beaumesnil, after a short pause,

"stranger things have happened. Perhaps it is the will of God."

"O aunt!" said the young girl, smiling. Then, seeing a glow-worm shedding its light on a bed of moss which covered a stone wall, she took it up, put it as an ornament into her hat, and resumed her walk, singing to herself with a sort of triumphant air, as if she had conquered her star.

From that time Mlle. Desrozaïs undertook, with the tacit sanction of her aunt, a regular campaign against the small brain and large inheritance of the young Baron. It would take us too long to recount the details of this attack, in which Clotilde displayed the greatest strength and courage, supported by the prudence of Mme. de Beaumesnil. To show how easy the victory was, we need only define a little more particularly the small nature of the personage whom Clotilde had selected for a prey.

The victim of a system of hot-house training, which an injudicious maternal tenderness frequently inflicts upon the object of its solicitude, Roland de Val-Chesnay, weak and defenceless, surrendered almost without resistance in this first battle of life. The good principles in which he had been educated had taken no real root in this inert and narrow mind. Unfortified by the salutary discipline of a public-school education, he had the passions of a man with the defects of a child, and, as is frequently the case, it was upon the heart of his mother that fell the first blow from the weak but violent hand of the ungrateful young man.

Two months afterwards the old Baroness, after many tears and entreaties, found herself obliged to sanction a union utterly repugnant to her feelings, notwithstanding the testamentary advantages Mme. de Beaumesnil had obtained from her husband in favor of her niece.

Clotilde and Roland were married in the little church of Férias with a great deal of display and with every appearance of felicity. In a few weeks, after various contests with her daughter-in-law, the Baroness was left to take care of the patrimonial domain of the Val-Chesnay's, and the young couple gayly went to take up their abode in a pretty hôtel in the Champs Elysées.

## II.

### THE HOTEL DE VERGNES.

THE marriage of Clotilde and the events which had preceded it had produced between the families of Beaumesnil and Férias a sort of coolness and restraint from which even Sibylle was not exempt. She was too candid and inexperienced herself to see in their true light all the intrigues of Mlle. Desrozais, whom she supposed to be seriously in love with Roland; and she certainly was far removed from the feeling of envy to which Mme. de Beaumesnil and the young Baroness attributed the coldness of her manner; but she had been unpleasantly surprised by the extreme promptitude with which M. de Val-Chesnay had usurped in the

heart of Clotilde the place of the Raoul who was in Persia. The merits of the young Baron did not appear to her sufficiently overwhelming to produce so sudden a revolution, and she could only see in it an inconstancy and frivolity by which her friend was seriously lowered in her esteem.

The grandparents of Sibylle naturally judged the conduct of Clotilde with more severity, from their greater experience, but they judged themselves yet more severely, and could not excuse the innocent egotism which had at first blinded them to the inferior qualities of the young Baron. After having run the risk of inducing Sibylle to form ties so unworthy of her, they entirely abandoned the idea of forming an alliance in their neighborhood, being resolved that in so important a matter they would not allow themselves to be influenced by any personal feeling. The departure of Sibylle for Paris was now, therefore, definitely determined upon. M. de Vergnes was written to, and wrote in reply, that it was fortunate she was coming, as already an army of aspirants besieged his house day and night with guitars; so much so, that the police began to remark it. In the mean time, Sibylle's health appearing not very strong, M. and Mme. de Férias eagerly caught at the pretext for keeping their granddaughter with them another year. They wrote rather timidly on the subject to M. de Vergnes, who replied that it was a good idea, for another year in the country

would be a great benefit to Sibylle, and that, as for the would-be lovers, a year of delay would only make them more patient and more anxious.

The Marquis and Marchioness had perhaps hoped they should die before the end of this year of grace. This blessing, however, was not vouchsafed to them. One sorrowful morning in the succeeding autumn they accompanied Sibylle to the railway station, where they took leave of her. Always opposed to outward demonstration or display, they endured this painful separation with calmness and dignity, although an expression of anguish was imprinted on their features. When, after driving back to the castle in silence, the two old people entered their now solitary home, they shut themselves up in their granddaughter's room, and wept bitterly, clasped in each other's arms.

The departure of Sibylle had been witnessed by another despairing heart; this was Jacques Féray, of whom the young girl had taken leave the night before, not without emotion. She was not sure the unfortunate man had understood it, and she was surprised and touched to see him the next morning waiting for her at the station. When the train left, the poor creature began to run, to try and follow it, but he soon fell exhausted on the ground. For a few days he remained near the station, watching the trains, to see whether Sibylle would return, and then, giving up that hope, he retired to his hut

on the cliff, to lament in the solitude her prolonged absence.

The Count de Vergnes received Sibylle on her arrival, and conducted her to his hôtel in the Chaussée d'Antin, where she found the Countess impatiently expecting her in the society of three lap-dogs, who greeted Mlle. de Férias with lugubrious barks. She was soon established in a prettily furnished apartment, where, notwithstanding the unaccustomed noises of the street, and also the agitation of her own heart and mind, she speedily fell asleep; for at her age slumber comes without courting. The next morning, when she made her appearance, M. de Vergnes presented her in the court-yard of the hôtel with two blood-horses he had provided for her. She was delighted with the idea of trying one of them, and of accompanying her grandfather in his morning ride in the Bois de Boulogne. The Count was very willing to display his pretty granddaughter.

During three weeks M. de Vergnes devoted himself to her service with the juvenile ardor and chivalrous grace for which he was distinguished. He conducted her to the museums, the picture-galleries, the public buildings, and took her to all the theatres; then, one fine day, under the pretext of a little fatigue, he delegated for twenty-four hours to Miss O'Neil his office of cicerone, and did not resume it.

His zeal was exhausted; he resumed his own habits of life, and henceforth Sibylle rarely saw him, excepting at meals; but when she

did meet him, he was always charming and entertaining ; and he brought his granddaughter all kinds of trinkets and curiosities, and an abundance of bonbons. He was perpetually joking with Miss O'Neil, pretending that he was in love with the Irish lady, and in despair at her cold treatment of him.

This standing joke was very convenient for him. When he wished to leave a little earlier for his club, or elsewhere, he would say, "Miss O'Neil, I can no longer bear it; a little hope, or I must leave."

And he did leave. He never remained at home in the evening, for his definition of Paris was, that it is a town in France where men sometimes spend their evenings with other men's wives, but never with their own.

The independent habits of the Count de Vergnes seemed, however, to create no void in the existence of the Countess, which was extremely well filled.

"I really do not know," she would say, every morning, "how I shall be able to accomplish all I have to do to-day."

She awoke about eight o'clock, took her chocolate in bed, fed her dogs, and slept again until ten. She then rose, and began her toilet, which was sometimes finished by twelve o'clock. Then came the hour of her second breakfast, which was usually a prolonged one. Then she drove to several shops, made the people unroll yards of different materials, and bought nothing. She returned to

her hôtel, made a second toilet, and proceeded to the Bois. Afterwards she would visit a confectioner's shop, and eat *paté de foie gras* and ices, accompanied by a glass of Spanish wine, and then begin her visits ; in the intervals consuming about half a pound of bonbons. At seven she dined with what appetite she could. She then made her third toilet for her evening visits.

Mme. de Vergnes, as a matter of course, considered it her duty to draw her granddaughter into the circle of busy idleness, round which she turned every day with the convulsive frivolity of a squirrel in its cage. She introduced her gradually to all her friends, who were so numerous that it took several months to exhaust the list. One of the most intimate ones had been dead six weeks when the Countess and Sibylle presented themselves at her door.

"What!" exclaimed the Countess to the porter, who had come out to her carriage to announce to her this distressing intelligence; "dead! Can what you tell me really be true?"

"Yes, madame," said the porter, who was rather witty, "she has been dead six weeks; she is even buried."

"Ah, do not tell me such dreadful things!" said the Countess. "It is really astonishing! Such is life, my dear child. John, drive to the confectioner's, — Rue Castiglione, you know."

Sibylle usually accompanied her grandmother in the evenings to three or four salons, at each of

which she stopped a few moments. If the first aspect of Parisian society did not altogether equal the expectations of Sibylle, still, this kind of life had its compensations. In spite of the insipidity of this vortex of worldliness, she passed many pleasant hours in the mornings, when visiting with Miss O'Neil different resorts of interest, and the theatres in the evenings, and even in the streets; for her active and cultivated mind could enjoy the ceaseless activity and the imposing show by which she was surrounded. The intellectual charm of Paris fascinated her.

After a residence of some months at the Hôtel de Vergnes, Sibylle, in a letter to the Marquis de Férias, endeavored to convey to him her impressions. "I experience," said she, "the extreme of interest and also the extreme of *ennui*. Paris seems to offer more to the intellect and less to the soul than any other place. My mind is interested, and my heart is sad. If I can choose my own residence, I would never be more than a bird of passage in this great city.

"When I first arrived, it appeared to me like a carnival which must come to an end; but it never does; it is the every-day life. These people seem to come, go, move about, laugh at each other, and die, all at once. Death in Paris always surprises me; it does not appear natural. Here they seem to live on dainties, not on bread. Ah, I would rather eat my daily bread quietly in my dear old home and beside the arm-chair of my dear grandfather!"

Sibylle only confided to M. de Férias a small portion of her feelings. The void she felt in the life of Paris seemed to increase daily, and on one point touched her heart very nearly. The eccentric conjugal relations which existed at the Hôtel de Vergnes formed in her mind a painful contrast with the remembrance of the delightful and almost holy intimacy she had been used to witness at Férias. It was evident that M. and Mme. de Vergnes, with the exception of their meetings at breakfast and dinner, lived as far apart as if they had been separated by the ocean. They had not in common either a joy or a sorrow, a memory or a hope. They would exchange at their meals some commonplace remarks, and then each return to their own course.

Sibylle at first was disposed to believe that the wrong was chiefly on the side of her grandmother, whose extravagant dissipation and utter emptiness of mind were only too apparent. Struck, on the contrary, by the brilliant qualities of the Count, she supposed that he had been at first wearied by the incurable silliness of his wife, and so discouraged as gradually to become estranged from her. She therefore found excuses for the roughness of language and manner in which the Count de Vergnes, so gracious and gallant in society, sometimes indulged towards his wife. One day, however, she was surprised at the violence of a tirade upon which he entered against women who did not know how to grow old, and asked herself if this piece of morality, ex-



cellent in itself, came with a good grace from the lips of the Count. These reflections caused her new doubts, upon which, shortly afterwards, a fresh light was cast.

About this time her grandfather experienced a slight attack of gout, and for a week was unable to leave the house. Sibylle was surprised to see her grandmother renounce all her habits of daily life, and devote herself to the care of her husband with a zeal which was the more meritorious as it was but ill repaid. The Count received all her attentions with a sulky coldness, but treated his granddaughter with much more courtesy.

One day, when they were conversing, the Countess, sitting by, made some remarks.

M. de Vergnes only shrugged his shoulders. "My dear friend," said he, "it is not worth while to speak merely for the sake of talking; when a person has not two ideas, it is better to say nothing."

"But, my friend," said the Countess, "you are really too unkind!" And she put her handkerchief to her eyes.

"Come, my dear," said the Count, "I see what has put you out of humor; you have spent three or four evenings at home. You are not equal to it. Go see your friends, wear out your horses, display your fine dresses! It is the only kind of happiness you can understand. I will no longer deprive you of it."

This uncalled-for attack roused the Countess from her habitual listless-

ness, and she replied with one of those outbursts of anger and truth which injustice will sometimes extort from the lips of the most patient and enduring. "Ah," exclaimed she, "this is too unjust, too unworthy! I do not wish to make a scene, but I will answer you. You shall not try to lower me in the esteem of this child, without any effort on my part to prevent it. Besides, what she sees here should be a lesson to her, and it is right she should understand it. I, also, was a child when you married me, and if I have made no improvement, if I have remained, as you say, without two ideas in my head, if I have to blush for my want of knowledge, whose fault is it? If, instead of the object of a mere passing fancy, I had been truly your wife, your friend, would it have been so? Did I not love you sufficiently to listen to your advice, your instructions, your suggestions, had you taken the trouble to impart them to me? Ah, you well know how thankfully I would have welcomed them! It was all I asked for, all I expected, — to be near you, to listen to you, to raise myself to a level with you! Every young girl with a true heart is ready, when she marries, to become the docile, happy pupil of her husband. A woman will learn everything from the man she loves, and from him only. You left me almost immediately. You did not choose to sacrifice a single taste, a single habit, to devote a single evening, to make of the child who adored you a companion for your soul. You reproach

me with my insipidity; it is your own work. And you even reproach me with the folly, the emptiness, the dissipation of my life! But which of us first deserted the family hearth, where all the happiness I would have asked for would have been to sit at your feet? Even after all these years, as soon as you remain at the fireside I attach myself to it. And this is the way you receive me! Ah, if I had not thrown myself into this vortex of worldliness and vanity, my grief would have killed me, or I might have gone astray as others have done! If I have remained a child and silly woman, at least I have been an honest one. And if my life is miserable, my head empty, and my heart broken, at least your honor has been safe and your name unspotted."

As she finished speaking, the poor woman burst into a flood of tears; she rose, and left the room.

The Count de Vergnes, although a libertine and an egotist, was neither silly nor altogether bad; at first he had tried to interrupt with impatient interjections the energetic re-primations of his wife; then, as if astonished and cowed by the unexpected and vehement eloquence of this inoffensive creature, he had ended by listening to her with a sort of confusion and respect. When she left the room, he said to Sibylle in a grave voice unusual to him, "My dear, go and see if your grandmother wants anything."

Sibylle ran to her side; she found the Countess on her knees, sobbing. She tenderly caressed her, and told

her her grandfather had sent her. She consoled her by the prospect that, as age and infirmity would soon confine her grandfather more closely to his own fireside, it would be in her power to gain some influence over him, and to live on happier terms with him.

The Countess answered her, "My dear child, it is rather late, but with your help I may do something; I will trust to you."

Sibylle induced her grandmother to remain more at home, especially in the evenings, and tried to interest her by reading aloud to her in turn with Miss O'Neil; and she had the satisfaction of aiding her in preparing for the solitude of old age by more worthy and serious occupations.

Sibylle had intended passing a portion of the summer at Férias; but she determined to sacrifice this expected pleasure in order to continue her work of filial piety, and not to desert her grandmother, who had formed for her a most touching attachment. She therefore accompanied her grandparents to Saint Germain, where they passed their summers in order to be as near as possible to Paris. In this more retired life the bond of union between the Count and Countess de Vergnes, which their granddaughter strove with delicate hand to draw closer, was perceptibly strengthened.

One day M. de Vergnes took her hand in his. "You are a good child," said he, with an accent of emotion. "You will have your reward."

He then went towards Mme. de Vergnes, tenderly kissed her, and left the room.

Mme. de Vergnes made a sign to Sibylle to come to her, and, clasping her in her arms, she wept, pressing her to her heart.

This happy circumstance in a measure reconciled Sibylle to the somewhat artificial life at Saint Germain; in the autumn they returned to Paris, where the crisis of her destiny awaited her.

### III.

#### RAOUL.

MADemoiselle DE FÉRIAS was not so entirely absorbed in her attentions to her grandparents as altogether to abstract her mind from the delicate personal question which her residence in Paris was expected to decide for her, namely, her establishment in marriage. On the contrary, there were many reasons why this subject should frequently be in her thoughts. In the first place, her residence at the Hôtel de Vergnes forced her to lead a kind of life uncongenial to her tastes, and which even interfered with the exercise of her affections, as she was not able to follow the dictates of her heart by dividing her time between Paris and Férias. Then, to her serious and disciplined mind, marriage appeared to be the great law of moral life, to be fulfilled at the proper time according to the Divine ordinance. Lastly, and above all, this grave young girl had in her heart all the tender weak-

nesses of a woman; and neither the amusements nor the intellectual pleasures of Paris, nor even the duties she had taken upon herself, were sufficient to satisfy the aspirations of her soul after a more perfect happiness. With the glowing imagination of her age and character, she had formed her ideal, and one of a heroic type; she vaguely pictured to herself a being worthy of the sacrifices she was prepared to make for one she could love; she was willing to give her heart, her hand, her life, to the man whom she might find worthy of such devotion, and prepared fully to return it.

Notwithstanding her youth and inexperience, Sibylle was endowed with a keenness of perception, and a faculty of judging, which might be expected to preserve her from the bitter disenchantment which is frequently the end of highly raised expectations. She felt that in making choice of a companion for life her grandparents were too worldly minded and frivolous greatly to assist her by their opinions, and that she could rely only on the advice of Miss O'Neil and the promptings of her own heart.

The Count de Vergnes would amuse himself with parading before the eyes of his granddaughter an imaginary battalion, as he called it, of marriageable men, and then would proceed to ridicule the individuals of this interesting legion; afterwards he would reproach her with her fastidiousness, and laugh at the highly raised expectations he attributed to her.

"I know what you want, my dear,"

he would say; "you require a man handsome, rich, noble; then he must be an artist, a musician, a good horseman, witty, and devout! Well, you will look in vain for such a one; it is a variety which does not exist."

"But no," said Sibylle, "I do not ask for so much. I ask only for a man whom I can love!"

"Ta! ta! ta!" replied the Count; "you are too unreasonable."

These conversations were a great amusement to the Count de Vergnes, but they did not change the sentiments and ideas of Mlle. de Férias. She had not failed to remark in the intercourse of the world, that the matrimonial habits of M. and Mme. de Vergnes were in no manner exceptional in polite society; but, on the contrary, in a greater or less degree, the same as those of their circle of acquaintances. The heart and mind of Sibylle rebelled against the idea of forming one of those marriages of which the ordinary termination appeared to be a sort of mutual weariness, an amicable separation, and a virtual divorce.

She thought of the far different union of the Marquis and Marchioness of Férias, of their pure and gentle affection, increased rather than diminished by the flight of years, and which had impressed upon her imagination a sort of ideal type of Christian marriage. Sibylle also hoped to be the beloved and faithful companion of the man to whom she should be united, not only for time, but also, as she trusted, for eternity. She believed that a true marriage should

not only be founded upon the love which unites two hearts, but upon the religion which has instituted and sanctified the bond between them. Such were her ideas, and, always true to her convictions of right, she had determined never to marry any man who did not seriously share her religious belief. This resolve, good in itself, unhappily was one difficult to realize. Although in these days there are still found some striking instances of high qualities of mind joined to the most fervent religious convictions, still they are rare, and it cannot be doubted that an extreme emancipation of thought and a critical if not a sceptical spirit are widely spread throughout society; and it was with regret that Mlle. de Férias remarked that the men whom she met in society, the most distinguished for mind and talent, were usually spoken of as free-thinkers, and not unfrequently as free-livers also.

The greater part of Sibylle's second winter in Paris had passed, and she began to believe that her grandfather was right when he said that the variety she required did not exist. Perhaps she was right, but her mistake was in thinking that she would be able entirely to control her heart, and to follow the dictates of reason.

Among the number of the drawing-rooms where Mlle. de Férias had been presented by her grandmother there was one to which some secret charm seemed to attract her. It was that of the duchess dowager De Sauves, who, together with her only son, the Duke de Sauves, and the

young Duchess, his wife, resided in one of the most luxurious hôtels of the Faubourg St. Honoré. This saloon, where the old Duchess, with one singular exception, of which we shall afterwards speak, received only a limited circle, in consequence of her strict prejudices in favor of good blood and certain opinions, did not seem to offer any special interest or resources; nevertheless, Sibylle never came to her receptions without a certain vague feeling of emotion which she scarcely acknowledged to herself, so unreasonable and causeless did it appear to her. This singular feeling was connected with an early reminiscence of her childhood, — her interview in the park at Férias with an unknown stranger named Raoul, whose appearance and conversation had always remained imprinted upon her memory with a kind of romantic association. The name of Raoul was to her dear and almost sacred. The reader may remember with what involuntary agitation she had heard it pronounced by Clotilde, in her recital of her love-affair; and this name, which was frequently repeated in the saloon of the Hôtel de Sauves, had always for Sibylle a kind of mysterious fascination.

She could not, indeed, suppose that the Raoul of whom Mme. de Sauves often spoke could be her Prince Charming, of the park of Férias; but neither could she doubt that it was the identical Raoul whose imaginary passion in the narrative of Clotilde had hastened his departure for Persia. This, however, was a dis-

covery Sibylle had made herself, for her former friend, with whom she kept up only a rare and rather cool intercourse, had her own reasons for not enlightening her on this point; but Sibylle had soon recognized in the young Duchess de Sauves, *née* Blanche de Guy-Ferrand, the friend of the convent-life of Clotilde, of whom she had spoken as the cousin of her hero. Afterwards it was not difficult to conjecture that a certain Count de Chalys, of whom the young Duchess spoke as *my cousin* Raoul, and who had actually returned from Persia only a few months previous, must bear a strong resemblance to the fortunate man who had once gained the unanimous suffrage of so many young ladies in the convent. Sibylle said to herself her interest proceeded from curiosity, and that when that was satisfied it would probably vanish. He did not seem to have any strong taste for society; for, although she frequently passed the evenings at the Hôtel de Sauves, she had never happened to meet him there. In the conversations she heard respecting this invisible cousin, M. de Chalys was always spoken of as a distinguished man, and one much sought after in the world; but, with the reserve natural to a young girl, she made no inquiries in regard to him. She had sometimes thought of questioning the young Duchess about him, for Sibylle felt herself drawn towards this young woman; but she, on the contrary, frequently treated her rather with a coldness and restraint, which did not invite to

any confidential conversation. Again, however, the capricious Duchess seemed attracted towards Mlle. de Férias, who could not understand the meaning of the curious and intense glance she sometimes fixed upon her.

We will explain to the reader the singular conduct of the Duchess towards Sibylle, and also introduce him to some new acquaintances.

#### IV.

##### THE DUCHESS BLANCHE.

BLANCHE DE GUY-FERRAND, Duchess de Sauves-Blanchefort, was not beautiful, scarcely even pretty; but she was charming. She had golden hair, and blue-gray eyes, and the most delicate features. Her principal attraction was her grace, which was remarkable; and her taste in dress was something wonderful. She always knew perfectly well what suited her style of appearance, and in evening dress she looked like a fairy.

It was now five years since she had been married to the Duke Oswald-Louis de Vital de Sauves, who was some twenty years older than herself, but an amiable and still very handsome man. The Duke had, indeed, reached his fortieth year before he yielded to the entreaties of his mother to marry. His ruling passion had been horses and hunting, and he was fond of the pursuits of a country life, and in marrying he made it a condition that he should be allowed to continue to pass a portion of his

time at his estates, which he was, in fact, in the practice of visiting at least twice a month.

Mlle. de Guy-Ferrand had allowed herself to be made a Duchess with the rather sorrowful indifference which appeared to predominate in her character. As a young girl, she had not been much remarked, but with the aid of the greater liberty of taste and selection granted her as a married woman, she had speedily taken her place among the stars in the horizon of fashion; and her miniature graces formed a striking contrast with the noble and ample style of the masculine beauty of the Duke.

Her husband continued to lead the kind of life for which he had stipulated; during the summers he resided with his wife at the Château de Sauves; in the winters they returned to their hotel in Paris; but out of every month he passed a fortnight at his estates, to visit his grounds and his stables, leaving the young Duchess under the gentle guardianship of his mother. He had the reputation of being an excellent husband, and there are, in fact, many worse ones.

Two children were born to them within five years of their marriage.

The Duchess Blanche had led some years of this tranquil existence, which appeared to bear, at least, a great resemblance to happiness, when, going one evening to visit her mother, Mme. de Guy-Ferrand, who was slightly indisposed, she was surprised to find by the fireside her cousin,

Raoul de Chalys, who had arrived that morning from Marseilles, after a long sojourn in the East. M. de Chalys, left an orphan at an early age, had had for a guardian the father of Blanche, and, after the death of M. de Guy-Ferrand, he had paid his widow every filial attention in his power. His intimacy with Blanche was, therefore, much greater than that ordinarily existing between cousins; nevertheless, the young Duchess, on meeting him again after so long a separation, manifested more surprise than pleasure, and seemed even to repel his fraternal embrace with an air of cold dignity. She addressed to him some commonplace questions, and then relapsed into silence, while her mother pursued the affectionate interrogatory which the arrival of Blanche had interrupted. Then Mme. de Guy-Ferrand, feeling fatigued, retired, after asking Raoul to entertain Mme. de Sauves until her carriage should come to take her home.

The first few minutes of this *tête-à-tête* were passed in a somewhat embarrassed silence; M. de Chalys looked at the young Duchess with a sort of puzzled curiosity.

"My cousin," said he, suddenly, "I must compliment you on two things: in the first place, you have become a very pretty woman; and in the second, I know you are a happy one; and nothing in the world can give me greater pleasure than the knowledge of this fact."

Blanche raised her eyes to his, and tried to answer him with a smile;

but her lips moved without uttering any words, and she burst into tears. Raoul, surprised, and uncertain what to do, moved towards her, but she rose, and hastily left the room.

The Count de Chalys stood for a moment as if confounded, his eyes fixed upon the door by which his cousin Blanche had disappeared; then, clasping his hands, "Ah!" said he, "what can be the meaning of this?"

While he was in this state of perplexity the door reopened, and the young Duchess returned, her eyes still red, but with a smile on her face. She put out her hand, and said, cordially, "Excuse me, it is nothing; do not go, let us talk awhile."

She threw herself into an arm-chair, and questioned him rapidly upon his travels, and upon his life in the East. This put them more at ease, and they were soon laughing together.

"There now," said Raoul, "this is like old times, when I was your brother; now I seem like your grandfather. Ah, how old I feel! Good night, cousin!"

When he had risen to take his leave, Blanche had once more become serious.

He pressed her hand, and said, "May I come to see you sometimes?"

"Yes, often, I hope," said the young woman, "as you please!"

From there the Count de Chalys went to visit a friend of his, a great student, who lived on the street Servandoni. His name was Louis Gandrax, and he had the honor of

being well known to Mlle. de Férias, and even of exciting her interest to an unusual degree. Sibylle, at first, had been not a little surprised at finding this plebeian admitted on terms of intimacy to the very exclusive drawing-room of the Hôtel de Sauves. Notwithstanding the very liberal and frankly expressed opinions of M. Gandrax, the old Duchess treated him with even more respect than she paid to some men belonging to the most distinguished families of France. The explanation of this anomaly was a little curious. M. Louis Gandrax, who was a man of no family, had, in his early youth, practised medicine with great success; but, although poor, he had renounced a lucrative practice in order to devote himself exclusively to scientific pursuits. Endowed with high faculties of mind, combined with great industry, in a few years he attained to an elevated rank among the scientific men of the age; and some remarkable discoveries in chemistry and physics had obtained for him, much earlier than the usual age, the honors of the Institute. He was now thirty-five, and strikingly handsome; his complexion was dark, and his high forehead and regular features had the firmness of a bronze statue; his eyes were full of fire, and yet calm; his easy, measured, quiet, and sarcastic mode of speaking accorded well with his *distingué*, haughty, and cold appearance. He was a radical democrat and a decided materialist; and he neither concealed nor paraded his opinions. In short, he was a

singular friend for the Duchess de Sauves; who, both in religion and politics, belonged to the ultramontane party.

Nevertheless, the Duchess was always happy to number M. Gandrax among her guests, although his presence frequently caused her no little anxiety. With a strong mind and deep religious feelings, this singular woman was weak only on one point; this was an extreme dread of death. Her health was far from good, and about ten years previous, while suffering from a serious attack of illness, she had, during the absence of her family physician, called in M. Gandrax, who at that time lived in her neighborhood. His skill, his calm and decided mode of speaking, and his strong magnetic influence, had had a great effect upon the excitable and nervous temperament of the Duchess. She placed in him entire confidence, and when he gave up the practice of medicine, at her earnest entreaty he continued to prescribe for her as a physician. She felt very grateful to him; she believed he had already many times saved her life; she flattered herself he would save it many times still, perhaps altogether. The adoration she professed for this important being, joined to her horror of his political and religious opinions, constituted between the Duchess and her physician a bond of union somewhat similar to that between Louis XI. and his astrologer.

Louis Gandrax returned her generous confidence with a sincere attachment; but he was frequently



amused at the eccentric and almost scandalous part he was called upon to enact in the fastidious and exclusive society of the Hôtel de Sauves. He played his part, too, although not a man of the world, with perfect good-breeding; nevertheless, his most reserved expressions sometimes produced the effect of exploding bombshells in the midst of this severely orthodox circle. The poor Duchess employed all her tact to persuade her other guests to tolerate the eccentricities of the saviour of her life. When he dined with her, she would try and cajole him, by supplicating words and looks, into a little respect for the ideas and sentiments of the rest of the company.

"But now, Gandrax," she said to him, "joking apart, you do believe in something?"

"Yes, certainly, madame," replied Gandrax with the utmost coolness; "in the god Pan."

"At least, my friend," she resumed, shortly afterwards, "you believe in what they are speaking of now, — in love."

"Do I believe in it, madame?" answered Gandrax; "love is a disordered vibration of the nerves of the head, and thus affects the heart; certainly I believe in it."

Sometimes the poor Duchess could scarcely bear it. "Ah, my friend!" cried she one day, "shall I ever have the sorrowful courage to give up your acquaintance?"

The celebrity of Louis Gandrax, the originality of his character, and the singularity of his presence at the

Hôtel de Sauves, were not alone what had attracted Sibylle's attention towards him; it was that from him she most frequently heard the name of Raoul, of whom he spoke with a grave and deep feeling, and never in the ironical manner habitual to him. She knew they were united by an intimate friendship, and that, during the long absence of the Count de Chalys, M. Gandrax had been his assiduous and constant correspondent. This fact created in the mind of Sibylle a feeling of sympathy towards a person whose ideas on all subjects were entirely the opposite of her own.

The very day of his arrival in Paris, Raoul had paid a visit to Louis Gandrax, and had even passed a portion of the day with him; the latter, therefore, was not a little surprised to see the Count reappear at eleven o'clock at night, in the little apartment where he sat working by the light of his students' lamp.

"Bravo!" said he; "you are welcome. Has anything happened?"

"O, nothing serious," said Raoul.

"I will tell you, however, what it is. In the first place, I must confess I have not always been quite frank with you; when I went to Persia, I allowed you to believe that my only motive for going was my curiosity and my artistic tastes. This was not the whole truth, and, although a friendship like ours should not have permitted any secrets between us, it appeared to me superfluous to speak of some secondary reasons which, indeed, were not quite devoid of an ab-

surd motive. You know my cousin, the Duchess Blanche?"

"It would be strange if I did not, as I am in the habit of saving her mother-in-law's life every fortnight."

"You remember my extreme intimacy with her mother and herself, and my frequent visits with Mme. de Guy-Ferrand to the convent where Blanche was educated. I only looked upon her as a little girl, and, although fond of her as of a sister, I never dreamed of admiring her any more than I would a doll. But the idea began to occur to me that the little girl cared a great deal for me, and that her mother was favorably disposed towards a union between us. I began to apprehend some unpleasant explanations, and, to make my story short, two or three months before the time came for Blanche to leave the convent, I resolved to travel, and to go to Persia."

"Weak!" murmured Gandrax. "And then?"

"A letter from you received at Ispahan informed me of the marriage of Blanche with the Duke de Sauves. I felt thankful for the news. I did not, however, return immediately; I spent a year in Persia, one in Constantinople, one in Egypt, one in Greece. At last I returned. This evening, as my duty and my feelings dictated, I went to visit my aunt. She received me a little coldly at first, but she is a good woman, and, besides, her daughter is a Duchess, and soon she was as affectionate as in former years. Then the young

Duchess came. I perceived in her manner a shade of resentment, a little coldness, a little emotion, a little confusion. I can scarcely describe it."

"Bah!" said Gandrax, "what folly! Your cousin adores her husband, and no wonder, for he is a magnificent man, and entirely devoted to her."

"You talk too much, my friend," answered Raoul, quietly. "Know, then, that Mme. de Guy-Ferrand having left me alone with the young Duchess, I took the opportunity of congratulating her on the happiness of which you speak. Well, she looked me in the face for the first time, burst into tears, and left the room."

"O, indeed!" said Gandrax, frowning.

"She came back in a moment after, recovered herself, and was kind, friendly, sisterly, but not at all natural, and the fire of passion was in her eyes. Well, what do you say now?"

"I say you must not see her again."

"And how can I avoid seeing her, living in Paris, and she my nearest relative? It is impossible."

"Go back to Persia, then," said Gandrax.

"I shall not go back to Persia."

"Then why do you ask my advice?"

"I do not ask your advice, I only relate to you an episode in my useless existence; that is all."

M. de Chalys rose, and paced the floor of the study.

"No one can be less at home on these subjects than I am," resumed Gandrax; "but a child could foresee

the consequences of such an adventure. In fifteen days, or in fifteen months, if you yield to the current of events, you will be the lover of the young Duchess, who is the wife of an excellent man and your own near relation; that is to say, you will deliberately commit a wrong action, from which I withhold my approval and esteem. I have said."

"Yes," said Raoul, stopping abruptly in his walk; "truly, a bad action! And what is a bad action? What is your standard? And what if I think it a good one? What if I find the young woman exceedingly improved, and if I find myself drawn towards her by one of the sweetest laws of nature, what other law is there, then, to prevent my yielding to the first one?"

"The law of honor," said Gandrax, dryly.

"The law of honor," returned Raoul, raising his voice,—"where do you find that law in the elements of which nature is composed? Show it to me in any of your chemical or mathematical combinations. Be logical. Why should I obey a fiction?"

"It is you who are not logical," answered Gandrax. "You would cast discredit upon the principles of emancipation and free thought. Because we do not believe in the existence of a God, would you infer that virtue and honor are baseless fictions? That would be folly. Am I not an honorable man? Point to a blot on my life! And why am I so? Partly, perhaps, from pride, and to prove to superstitious worshippers

that a man may believe in nothing, and yet act better than themselves. Yes, from pride, but also because I am logical, whatever you may say to the contrary; because I recognize in the moral, as well as in the material order, necessary laws; for good faith, self-respect, justice, probity and honor are wheels indispensable to the working of the social machine. Yes, I recognize these necessary laws, and I observe them. That which the plants and the stars do by their instinct, I do by my reason. In this consists my superiority, my dignity. I am a man."

"My friend, you pride yourself upon your self-control. I acknowledge you live with the austerity of a trappist; but why? Because the blood in your veins is as cold as if it descended from a glacier. Therefore, what merit is it in you?"

"I live as I choose to live," replied the young scholar, impressively. "One can do what one has the will to do. You are a woman."

Raoul laughed, and continued to walk in silence for a few minutes; then he resumed: "You may say what you choose, Louis, but when I have ceased to believe in a God, the source of all justice, the model of all virtue, the author of all moral law, I find no sufficient reason to restrain my tastes, my inclinations, my passions,—even my appetites."

"Ah," said Gandrax, smiling, "the truth is, Raoul, you are not an unbeliever; you are a rebel, and a rebel presupposes a master, and you talk of logic!"

"You are right!" said Raoul, with animation; "my unbelief is not calm and serene like yours; it is painful to me, it is desolating. You are right; I am a rebel, and my broken chain makes me suffer. I mourn that I can no longer find the God of my childhood. I seek him sometimes with tears, but in vain; he hides himself from me; and I sometimes am even willing he should crush me, so that I might behold him, though but for a single second."

Gandrax kindly took his hand.

Raoul pressed that of his friend firmly, and said, "May you, my poor Louis, never know how feeble are the strongest arguments of reason against the torrent of passion and the tempests of the soul!"

"Amen!" said Gandrax.

"Let us speak of other things," said Raoul, taking a seat. "I had another surprise to-day. I recognized in the Champs Elysées, in a very handsome carriage, that beautiful creature of whom I once spoke to you, who was in the convent at the same time with my cousin, and whose portrait I sketched. What was her name? Clotilde?"

"Clotilde Desrozais, I believe," said the young scholar, coldly. "She is now the Baroness Val-Chesnay; very rich, very elegant, and very much admired."

"Why, she used to be poor! Who is her husband?"

"A stiff, light-haired young man; no great things. She discovered him in the country, carried him off from his mother, and married him."

"I am not surprised to hear it. Does she visit my cousin?"

"Certainly; I often meet her at the house of Mme. de Sauves. She has invited me to her Monday evenings."

"Do you go?"

"O, about once in two months. It does not suit me particularly well there."

One o'clock struck before M. de Chalys rose to go.

Taking the hand of Gandrax, "Then," said he, "you are always happy!"

"Perfectly so."

"I am not. Good night!"

And he left.

The Count Raoul de Chalys had been left at an early age master of a large fortune, but that had not prevented him from giving a great portion of his time to intellectual pursuits; and, desirous of making himself acquainted with every species of knowledge, he had even devoted himself to scientific researches, for which he, in reality, had no particular taste nor aptitude. It was in this way he had formed so close an intimacy with Louis Gandrax, attracted towards him by his pure life and energetic character. The natures and temperaments of these two men were very different, and they were warm friends without either of them endeavoring unduly to influence the other. To the icy nature of Louis Gandrax, the passionate soul and excitable mind of Raoul would bring a life and warmth which sometimes surprised and greatly excited the

young scholar; and on Raoul the calm decision and the clearly defined views of his friend had a soothing and satisfying influence.

With a general taste for the fine arts, Raoul had early manifested an especial talent for painting; he devoted himself with ardor to this pursuit, and after ten years a few excellent works had placed his name among those of the masters of the art. The day after his return home he arranged his studio with a view of transferring to the canvas some of the numerous sketches he had made during his travels in the East. He resolved, by constant occupation, to divert his mind from the untoward attraction which drew him to the Hôtel de Sauves. Nevertheless, he could not refuse an invitation to dinner, which he shortly after received from Mme. de Guy-Ferrand. He was rather piqued at finding his cousin perfectly at her ease on this occasion. The following day he called upon the Duchess Dowager, and his cousin Blanche, while he was describing some of his travels, having affected to yawn behind her fan, he felt secretly irritated, when a new direction was given to his thoughts by the entrance into the drawing-room of the young Baroness of Val-Chesnay, *née* Clotilde Desrozais. Clotilde neither spoke to him nor looked at him; in fact, she did not appear to recognize him, which did not particularly please him, for he was struck and dazzled by the splendor of her beauty. However, before she took her departure, as she was standing

not far from him, her eyes fell on him; she had just extended to an old gentleman beside him an invitation to her receptions on Monday evenings. "But," said she, with a timid, hesitating air, "is it not Monsieur de Chalys?"

"Yes, madame."

"Well, then," said she, "the friend and relation of M. de Sauves will always be welcome at my house."

Raoul made a low bow, and thanked her.

At the moment when Clotilde was spreading the net over her former admirer, the eyes of the young Duchess sparkled; as she went to the door of the room with her friend, she said, inquiringly, "Has not my cousin grown old?"

"O yes, my dear," replied Clotilde; "I scarcely recognized him."

When Raoul made his appearance on Monday evening in the drawing-room of Mme. de Val-Chesnay, he found there his cousin Blanche, who looked on this occasion as if she had been dressed by the fairy godmother of Cinderella. After passing the evening in the society of these two charming young women, he went home convinced that he was the object of jealous contest between them, and that it was for him to decide to which of them he should surrender his heart.

It is not easy to define the reasons which make a man admired by women. The Count de Chalys, however, was certainly one calculated to please. His figure was tall and elegant, with a sort of indolent grace,

joined to an appearance of great strength and endurance, which gave him eminently what is called a *distingué* air.

His forehead was remarkably pure, and his chestnut hair was just beginning to recede a little from his temples. The great charm of his face consisted in the sweet, kind, and rather sad expression of his eyes, which were shaded by long eyelashes. Such was the Count de Chalys; he was a man whom it was impossible to meet in society without inquiring his name. Probably the greatest merit of the Count in the eyes of women was, that he always appeared ready to fall in love. His look of indifference became animated and devoted when talking to women; he inspired a feeling of interest and confidence.

Notwithstanding these dangerous qualities, the Count de Chalys had had but few love-affairs. He had never played the miserable part of a Lothario. The elevation of his nature and an innate feeling of honor and uprightness had preserved him from this. Now, however, unhappily, the situation was one which seemed likely to shake his resolutions on this point.

In the worldly life of Paris, such complications are not unusual, and Raoul had not the strength of religious principle to preserve him in circumstances of temptation.

The two young friends, who now cordially hated each other, seldom lost sight of him. Clotilde, we must say, really loved M. de Chalys, and

for the first time in her life experienced a feeling of true affection. She had scarcely been married to the Baron de Val-Chesnay, when she conceived for this weak young man a feeling of inexpressible contempt. For a year or two she had repressed the passionate feelings of her heart by plunging into the excitements of Parisian life; then ennui had seized upon her; and now the Count de Chalys appeared upon the scene, with all his real merits enhanced by the charm of former memories. She immediately guessed, too, that her friend Blanche, already her rival in the gay world, was particularly interested in him; and this was another reason for her resolution to make a conquest of his heart. The Duchess Blanche, of a better nature and with higher principles, perhaps would have succeeded in conquering her feelings, formerly innocent but now guilty, towards her cousin, which had been revived by his unexpected return, had she not been exasperated by these attempts to win the heart of the man who had been the hero of the dreams of her youth. Thus this young woman was drawn towards the dangerous abyss partly by love, partly by hate.

M. de Chalys frequently regretted the situation in which he found himself between these two young rivals; of the two he cared most for Blanche, touched by her constant affection, but he was in love with neither. The young Duchess received the attentions he paid her with a feeling that they did not make her happy.

Her conscience reproached her, but whenever she made an effort to conquer her own heart, some desperate attempt of Clotilde would drive her, with a feeling of blind desperation, to a renewal of the contest.

The Duchess, also, was scarcely less jealous of Mlle. de Férias. Looking, one day, at her mother's house, over Raoul's portfolio, she had been struck by three drawings, remarkable in themselves, and rendered still more so by the notes affixed to them. The first of these sketches represented, under the thick shade of a tree, and at the foot of a rock covered with vines, a little girl of singular beauty, standing resolutely in the attitude of a queen, and holding in her hand a wand as if it were a fairy sceptre. Underneath were inscribed the words: "Taken near the rocks of —, Normandy, August 10, 184—. Mademoiselle Sibylle." The next drawing represented the same child, in the same position, but with a face and figure indicating a greater degree of maturity. Underneath was written: "Mademoiselle Sibylle five years later." Finally there was a third drawing, finished with great care, and which bore this inscription: "Mademoiselle Sibylle at eighteen years of age." This was a study of a young girl whose face and expression were wonderfully presented in their greater development, and it formed almost an exact portrait of Mlle. de Férias. The young Duchess, stupefied with amazement, was on the point of pronouncing her name, but she refrained, and, turning to-

wards her cousin, "Who is this?" said she.

"I do not know," replied Raoul; "it is a child whom I once saw for a few moments, and who, if she is alive, must be an adorable creature by this time." He then related to his cousin his meeting with Sibylle, near the Fairy Rock, giving her all the particulars. "The name of the little village and the neighboring castle," added he, "has escaped me; or, rather, I believe I never knew it, for I went hastily through the country; but I have frequently felt tempted to revisit it. It is singular, but among all my reminiscences of travel, and I have many, there is none more vividly impressed upon my mind, nor of which the remembrance is sweeter to me than this one. There was something really extraordinary, almost supernatural, about the child." He was going on to enlarge upon the subject, when, seeing a frown on the brow of Blanche, he stopped.

As may be imagined, the young Duchess took no small pains to prevent a meeting between Mlle. de Férias and her enthusiastic cousin. She only invited Raoul to the Hôtel de Sauves when she knew Sibylle would not be there, and she saw him more frequently at the house of her mother, who was not intimate with Mme. de Vergnes. As for Clotilde, although she did not know the secret which chance had revealed to Blanche, still she took equal care to prevent a meeting which the beauty and prestige of Sibylle might make a danger-

ous one; and as M. de Chalys visited little excepting at these two houses, at other times confining himself to his studio and his club, it seemed likely that Sibylle and the artist would never meet, when an unforeseen circumstance occurred to break the charm which separated them.

## V.

### THE CHURCH OF THE MADELEINE.

ONE morning Mlle. de Férias, accompanied by an old servant of her grandmother, had gone to hear mass in her parish church, which was that of the Madeleine. She perceived at a little distance from her the Duchess Blanche, kneeling in an attitude of deep meditation. Sibylle had passed the previous evening at the Hôtel de Sauves, and had remarked in the young Duchess a greater degree than usual of the singular interest she frequently manifested towards her. The unexpected presence of Blanche in the church at first rather distracted her thoughts, but after a little time she became absorbed in the devotional exercises, when she was suddenly disturbed by the sound of suppressed sobs near her. The mass being just finished, and the church nearly empty, Sibylle, looking anxiously around, soon saw that it was the young Duchess who was weeping. Her face was concealed by her hands, but evidently her tears were flowing fast. Mlle. de Férias went to her, and said, in a gentle voice: "Pardon me, but you are

suffering; can I do anything for you?"

Blanche raised her head, and through her tears recognized her with a mixture of confusion and anger.

"No, mademoiselle," answered she, coldly, "you can do nothing for me."

Sibylle at this marked repulse felt her eyes fill with tears; she bowed slightly, and, drawing down her veil, made a sign to the servant, and prepared to leave the church. She had reached the door, when her arm was gently touched, and, turning round, she saw the young Duchess, with an altogether different expression on her face.

"Mademoiselle," said Blanche, "I fear I have offended you."

"A little," answered Sibylle, smiling.

"Pardon me," returned the young woman; "I am so unhappy. Will you come to see me to-day at two o'clock, and ask for me alone?"

"Yes, madame," said Sibylle, "I will come."

Blanche seized her hand, pressed it convulsively, and disappeared.

The morning seemed long to Mlle. de Férias, so much had the scene in the church awakened her curiosity and her interest. When she was admitted to the apartment of Mme. de Sauves, she found the latter in a state of agitation approaching to anguish.

On her entrance, the young Duchess rose to meet her; her eyes were hollow with weeping, but they shone with an unusual brilliancy. She took



the young girl's hands in hers, and drawing her close to her said, "Mlle. Sibylle, will you be my friend?"

"Most willingly," replied Sibylle.

Blanche threw her arms round her and kissed her tenderly, still weeping and sobbing. She made her sit on a sofa beside her, and, hiding her face on the bosom of Sibylle, she said, her words interrupted by her tears, "I love you — be kind to me — will you not love me? I so much need some one to love me."

When she became a little more calm, the little Duchess, still holding the hand of her new friend tightly clasped in her own, said with an attempt at a smile, "You do not understand all this, my dear; some day you will comprehend it; but promise me to love me and to save me."

"To save you!" murmured Sibylle, astonished.

"Yes, I know you can help me. You have so much sense and goodness, and I can trust you. But do not despise me! I have suffered so much, resisted so much. Listen to me. When I married, I loved some one — I had loved him a long time — ever since I knew I had a heart it was his. I expected to marry him, I had been taught to expect it, but he saw nothing; he did not choose to see anything. He went away; I thought he would never return. I gave up my dream of happiness — and I married."

Here the Duchess paused as if embarrassed.

Sibylle affectionately pressed her hand.

"Take courage," said she. "The other one came back, did he not?"

"Yes," returned Blanche, "he came back, and I found that I still loved him. I could not conceal it from him, and I have suffered martyrdom, for I know it is wrong, but I am so weak; and now God has given me the courage to throw myself in your arms, my good angel."

And she embraced Sibylle fervently, and then, rising, said, "My darling, I have given you my entire confidence; I esteem you so highly that I will do whatever you tell me to do. Come now, say, — what would you do in my place?"

In the midst of the chaos of reflections, suppositions, and interesting imaginations into which the revelations of the Duchess had plunged Mlle. de Férias, she found it difficult to collect her ideas sufficiently to frame an answer to these questions.

"But," she said, "you have too high an opinion of me; all this is so new to me that I know not what to say. But your confidence touches me deeply, and I will try with all my heart to deserve it. Let me see, — does this some one — does he love you?"

Blanche answered sorrowfully, "Not much, I fear — I mean — I believe."

"Why not throw yourself upon his honor, and tell him it would be better for your peace of mind that he should go away again?"

"Do you think so?" said Blanche; "but no, I could not do that; do not ask me that."

Sibylle reflected gravely for a few moments, and then said, "What I should do, would be this, I should simply confide all to my husband. Without entering into details, or mentioning names, I should tell him that I am too much alone, that as he is for me the symbol of duty, as the cross is that of faith, it is better for me that both should be constantly before my eyes, that they may be more in my heart. The Duke has a generous soul; he will understand it all, and you will be saved."

"Yes, I prefer that," said the Duchess; "you are right; the Duke has a generous soul. I think I should have loved him if he had tried to make me; but I seem nothing to him, like a child; he does not know me. Well, I will think of it."

"You must not think of it," said Sibylle, "you must do it. Is your husband in Paris?"

"Yes," returned the Duchess.

"Then promise me to speak to him this evening."

The Duchess suddenly rose.

"I hear him coming," said she.

"Promise me to speak to him immediately," said Sibylle.

"I promise," said the Duchess, embracing her; "adieu till to-morrow."

At this moment the Duke opened the door, and witnessed the affectionate parting of the two young friends; and when Sibylle left he took leave of her with the greatest courtesy.

M. de Sauves, who, as the saying is, "was not born yesterday," had not failed to remark at first sight the perturbed condition of the Duchess,

and felt like a man having the presentiment of a thunderstorm in the air. Nevertheless, he concealed his impressions under an appearance of nonchalance, and smilingly touched with his lips the brow of his young wife.

"I have just met the children in the park," said he.

Then he paced the floor of the boudoir, humming an air, and stopping here and there to look at the flowers in the vases; he picked a rose, and said, carelessly, "I did not know you were so very intimate with Mlle. de Férias, my dear."

"O yes, we are very intimate. You do not disapprove."

"On the contrary, she is a young person for whom I have a great admiration. She is very handsome, her style is perfect, and I believe she is in every way superior. What were you telling each other, when I came in?"

The Duchess summoned all her courage. "I was telling her my troubles," answered she.

"Your troubles!" replied the Duke, laughing; "what are they, my poor Blanche?"

"Very serious ones."

"O, indeed!" said the Duke, with the utmost serenity.

"Mlle. de Férias," resumed the Duchess, "has advised me to confide them to you. She says you have a generous soul."

The Duke was still calm in appearance, but his pulse began to beat more quickly.

"Really!" said he; "well, I do not

know whether I have a generous soul, but the advice appears to me to be good, and I am grateful to Mlle. de Férias."

The Duchess rose, and, leaning against an arm-chair, "My friend," said she, impressively, "do not leave me so much alone; or, rather, so as not to change your habits, take me with you to the country when you go. You will make me happier."

M. de Sauves breathed more quickly, as he said, "Are you not happy, then?"

"Not altogether so," replied Blanche. "I am very young to be left so much alone. I need more affection; more to fill my heart."

"Ah," said the Duke, in an impatient tone, "this is romance! And your children, are not they sufficient?"

"I adore my children, but believe me, my friend, at my age I need something besides."

"I do not understand these subtleties," cried the Duke. "If you are not happy, you are ungrateful to Providence and unjust towards me. These sorrows are purely imaginary, and I will not yield to your unreasonable fancies, nor make you and myself ridiculous by taking you with me to the country, like a camp-follower. It is absurd; it cannot be!"

The young Duchess, after a moment of sorrowful silence, raised her tearful eyes to her husband's face, and said, "My friend, understand me; it must be so."

The Duke de Sauves came very

near his wife, and said, gravely, "What does this mean?"

"It means that I feel myself weak, and I ask you to support me."

A livid hue overspread the countenance of the Duke; his eyes were inflamed with anger. His young wife sank, half fainting, on the sofa.

The Duke made no attempt to raise her, but, crossing his arms over his chest, he began to pace the room with long strides, followed by the anxious and imploring gaze of his wife. For ten minutes nothing was heard in the room but the heavy tread of the Duke upon the carpet, when he suddenly turned and approached the couch. The young Duchess half rose with a convulsive movement. He took her hands, looked her in the face, and said, in his deep voice, a little broken by emotion, "You are a good woman. I thank you."

At these words poor Blanche sobbed like a child, and, throwing herself on the breast of her husband, she wept long and bitterly. The Duke also wiped away some tears from his manly face.

In a few moments he said, "My dear child, I will leave you now, we both need repose; but be sure of one thing, I will take you with me."

"Thank you," murmured Blanche. And he left her.

Left to herself, the young Duchess threw herself on her knees and thanked God for the peace which penetrated her soul. For the remain-

der of the day she was perfectly happy. Towards evening, however, a bitter thought suggested itself. She pictured to herself Clotilde, and the probable triumph that awaited her, now that she herself had given up all thought of the love of Raoul. That night, as she lay awake revolving in her mind a thousand different plans to circumvent Clotilde, an idea struck her, which she determined to carry out; and having taken her resolution, which was an heroic one, Blanche fell asleep.

## VI.

### THE CROWN.

THE following day the young Duchess de Sauves spent a portion of the morning in visiting various shops of florists, where she made some mysterious purchases. She afterwards drove to the Hôtel de Vergnes, and having shut herself up with Mlle. de Férias, she recounted to her, with many effusions of friendship, her conversation with her husband, and the entire success of the line of conduct which she had suggested to her.

"My dear," said she, "you must come and dine with me to-day. My mother-in-law, at my request, is going to get up a little dance. There will be no one but yourself at dinner. Come just as you are. After dinner we will dress together. If you wish to please me you will wear your white and blue dress. I want to dress your hair myself."

Mlle. de Férias accordingly arrived about seven o'clock at the Hôtel de Sauves, and she observed the young Duchess was extremely agitated. During the dinner the Duke paid her a great deal of attention. At the dessert he joked with her upon her serious expression, and upon the depth of her blue eyes.

"You are a dangerous blonde," said he. "You look like an angel meditating a crime. Ah, you can really laugh sometimes! I am delighted to see it, mademoiselle."

Blanche having told him of the young girl's talent for drawing caricatures, the Duke would not believe it unless she consented to make one of him, and brought her pencils. Sibylle tried to excuse herself, but, as he insisted, she drew one with a ludicrous resemblance to the equestrian statue of Henri IV., and presented it to the Duke with a low courtesy. The Duke, drawing her towards a window, said to her, "Mlle. de Férias, you must permit me to tell you how grateful I am for your esteem and friendship. I hear you admire generous souls, and I am truly happy to hear that you rank me among them."

Sibylle blushed, put out her hand, and left the room.

The young Duchess led the way to her boudoir, and while they were dressing she talked rapidly on all sorts of subjects, inquiring into the tastes of her friend in regard to the fine arts, scenery, travel, etc. Have you seen this place, or that country? Have you been to Switzerland, to

Italy? No? well, we will go together when you are married." Here she stopped abruptly.

"Now I must dress your hair," said she.

She then made Sibylle sit down in front of a large glass, and opened carefully the parcels of flowers she had purchased in the morning. Sibylle observed they were all wild-flowers, of the species that grow in the woods; in particular a quantity of vines and twining plants.

Her fancy immediately carried her back to the woods of Férias, and to the solitary spots where she had been used to gather similar flowers. The young Duchess first arranged a part of Sibylle's beautiful fair hair in a graceful mass, then she began to braid and twine the remainder in a most artistic fashion. Afterwards she took the vines and flowers, and, weaving them into a graceful wreath, she crowned her like a wood-nymph.

While her hands were thus employed, Sibylle felt some tears falling upon her shoulder.

"Why do you weep?" said the young girl; "what is the matter?"

"It is nothing," said Blanche; "some tears, you know, are sweet."

Hers, however, were not altogether so; but if any bitterness mingled with them, still her sacrifice, laid upon the altar of right and duty, was a pure and noble one, and upon it, perchance, angels may have looked down with pleasure. When she had finished her labor of love and completed the toilette of Sibylle, she

was perfectly satisfied with the effect she had produced. "Ah," said she, "you are beautiful to-night! I am delighted with you. Come, now we must go down stairs"; and she led the way to the drawing-room.

Mlle. de Férias was really on this occasion not only beautiful, but captivating.

She was not very tall, but the perfect harmony of her figure made her appear so. Her great charm consisted in the marked but delicate outline of her features, in the beautifully shaped mouth, and, above all, in the expression of her eyes; habitually blue as the sea beneath a cloudless sky, under the influence of some strong emotion they would seem to grow darker, as if a cloud had passed over them, and even to shadow forth storms and emit flashes of light.

The young Duchess, who had observed this striking characteristic, had heightened it still more this evening by the manner in which she had arranged the crown of wild-flowers on her head; which, rather overshadowing her brow, had given to Sibylle's blue eyes a deeper and more expressive hue.

Such was the appearance of Mlle. de Férias as she entered the great drawing-room of the Hôtel de Sauves, on the arm of the Duchess Blanche.

The toilet had occupied so much time that the greater part of the guests were assembled when they entered the room. At the first glance the young Duchess perceived Raoul and Clotilde; they were seated side

by side on a divan, and appeared to be engaged in an animated conversation. Blanche, returning in a somewhat absent manner the salutations she received, immediately crossed the room, with Sibylle on her arm, and went straight towards the enemy. The Baroness de Val-Chesnay, seeing this formidable pair approach, felt a cold sensation in the region of the heart; and such was the alteration in her countenance that the Count de Chalys, who was talking to her at the moment, turned his eyes in the same direction as her own, and then, for the first time, he perceived Mlle. de Férias. Suddenly changing his leaning position for an upright one, "Who is that?" said he, in a hollow voice.

Clotilde did not answer him; she had risen; Raoul also rose, and stood at a little distance, while the Duchess and Sibylle shook hands with Clotilde. After this ceremony, the young Duchess turned towards the Count, and, addressing Sibylle, said, "The Count Raoul de Chalys, my cousin." Then, turning again to Raoul, "My friend, Mlle. Sibylle de Férias."

Blanche, having accomplished this stroke of policy, well understood the meaning of the profound astonishment expressed in the countenance of her cousin; but she was somewhat surprised to feel, at the same moment, Sibylle's arm tremble and lean heavily upon her own. She immediately led her to the opposite side of the saloon, and looking at her with affectionate curiosity, "My darling," said she, "I do not understand how

it is you appear to recognize Raoul after so many years,—tell me."

"I do not know," murmured Sibylle, "I suppose on account of this mysterious crown you have prepared for me; but who could have told you?"

"Guess."

"I cannot; it is all a mystery."

"Do you feel able to dance?"

"To dance? Why?"

"To bring back your color; you are too pale."

Blanche stopped her husband, who was passing, and said, "My friend, Mlle. de Férias wishes to dance with you."

The Duke bowed low, and putting his arm round Sibylle's slender waist, carried her off in the dance, like an eagle bearing a dove.

The Duchess, satisfied with the success of her plot, began to converse gayly with those around her; but never, for an instant, losing sight of the corner where Clotilde and Raoul were sitting *tête-à-tête*. She enjoyed the absent air of her cousin and the evident vexation of the young Baroness. She saw that the eyes of the Count were continually fixed upon Mlle. de Férias, and that the young girl was the object of his attention, and even the subject of his conversation.

M. de Chalys was, indeed, deeply moved and surprised by what had occurred. The poetical apparition of Sibylle, and the marked manner in which he had been presented to her by the Duchess, so entirely overcame his habitual coolness and delibera-

tion that he fell, like a school-boy, into the awkward mistake of questioning, earnestly, one pretty woman about another. "You know this young lady, madame?" said he to his neighbor.

"What young lady?"

"The one who wears a crown, — Mlle. de Férias, I believe."

"Slightly," replied Clotilde, coldly. "We are from the same part of the country."

"Ah!" Where is Férias?"

"In Normandy."

"Near the sea?"

"Not far from it."

"Is she intimate with my cousin?"

"So it seems."

"Does she live at Paris?"

"I think not; she is on a visit."

"For a long time?"

"Had you not better ask her yourself?"

Clotilde now left him, to dance with a young man who just then came to ask her.

M. de Chalys bore this departure with philosophy, and went over to speak to the young Duchess.

"Cousin Blanche," said he.

"Well, cousin, what is it?"

"Take pity on a man who is losing his mind, and let me ask you a few questions."

"I am listening."

"Did you know, when you presented me to Mlle. de Férias, that she was the original of the portrait you had seen in my portfolio?"

"Probably I did."

"And you love her?"

"Very dearly."

Raoul looked at the young woman with a fixed and inquiring expression. "And will you allow me to admire her?"

"I command you to," said Blanche.

"And then?"

"How? and then?"

"What do you command me besides?"

She turned her eyes towards him, and, putting up her fan, "To be good and happy," said she.

Raoul could read in the eyes of his young cousin the sincerity of her generous resolution. He rose, leaned over her, and with all the respect which a man can entertain for a woman in the tones of his voice, and in the expression of his eyes, he said, "Blanche, I revere you."

Sibylle was now near them, and the Duchess said, "Come, cousin, while I attend to the tea, you must entertain Mlle. de Férias. She has a taste for art; you will sympathize with each other; you can talk of painting, of landscapes, of woods, of rocks and fountains, *et cætera*."

Raoul bowed, and, taking the place of the Duchess, said, with an appearance of awkwardness and timidity most unusual to him, "I believe, mademoiselle, that about twelve years ago I had the honor of being allowed to kiss your hand, near a rock with water falling from it into a fountain. Do you remember it?"

"Yes," replied Sibylle, raising her clear blue eyes, with a smile.

"You remember it? It seems scarcely possible."

"It is, nevertheless, quite natural ;

I have not had many adventures in my life, and my meeting with you in my grandfather's woods was one of the few."

"I frightened you a good deal, did I not?"

"A little at first, yes."

"I can see you now with your white wand and your singular head-dress, almost the same as the one you now wear, I think."

"This one," replied Sibylle, raising her head a little haughtily, "I assure you, was not arranged by myself, and when it was done for me, I knew nothing of the surprise I was to enjoy this evening."

From the beginning of their conversation Raoul had been struck with the singular frankness and dignity with which the young girl spoke. The accents of her voice charmed him, and the eye and the soul of the artist were filled with admiration of her exquisite beauty. In short, an irresistible attraction urged him to the resolve that he would seek to win her heart, and he felt that upon his success would depend all the happiness of his future life. He ceased speaking on the subject of their former meeting, and began to converse upon art, and upon his travels; he endeavored to pour out all his resources of mind, heart, and soul, and, as it were, to lay them at the feet of Mlle. de Férias. Although his conversation contained not even the shadow of a direct compliment, still it was impossible for Sibylle not to feel that the tone of voice and the expression of the eyes of Raoul were

a continual homage to her charms; nor could she fail to comprehend that she herself was the inspirer of the rapturous eloquence with which he confided to her his impressions, his opinions, his discouragements, and his hopes. This delicate flattery could not but touch and please, and, at the same time, a little confuse her. She even feared she must appear silly and childish in his eyes; while, on the contrary, the few words she uttered seemed to him singularly just and appropriate. Now, however, Mme. de Vergnes, beginning to feel anxious at the marked attentions her granddaughter was receiving, came to interrupt their *tête-à-tête*. Sibylle immediately related to her, laughingly, the accidental meeting between herself and the Count de Chalys in the woods of Férias, and feeling a little more at ease in the presence of her grandmother, she replied gracefully to the questions the Count then addressed to her on the subject of Férias, of her family there, of the impressions of her childhood, and of her visits to fairy land. He listened with the utmost interest and attention, seeming even to divine her thoughts, and almost as if their two lives had always been united by sympathy, and as if the feelings of the soul of the one had always been reproduced in that of the other.

Clotilde, meanwhile, had not seen this suddenly developed intimacy without endeavoring to interrupt it by sundry artifices; several times in the intervals of the dance she had stationed herself very near Raoul,



and had displayed, with great effect, the beautiful outlines of her figure, and of her head with its magnificent masses of hair; then she seated herself and endeavored to excite his jealousy; she called Louis Gandrax, who had just entered the room, to sit beside her, and, under cover of her fan, she so used her magnificent eyes as to make all the icy coldness of the young scholar needful to prevent his heart from melting under the influence of such glances.

M. de Chalys saw all this by-play, but from the height of his own bliss; it did not trouble him. At last Sibylle, embarrassed by this marked devotion, proposed to her grandmother that they should retire. As Mme. de Vergnes rose to go, Raoul, bowing gravely, said to her, "Would you permit me, madam, to have the honor of paying my respects to you, and of offering to you the portrait I made of Mlle. de Férias twelve years ago?"

Mme. de Vergnes graciously assented, and retired with a presentiment that her granddaughter's wedding was not far distant.

The Count de Chalys left the Hôtel de Sauves in company with his friend Gandrax. They were both thoughtful, and exchanged but few words.

Suddenly, after a long silence, M. de Chalys said, abruptly, "What do you think of marriage, Louis?"

"What! already?" cried Gandrax, laughing; "well, my friend, I approve of it; marriage is the safety of the race. The more respect a nation entertains for the institution of mar-

riage, the nearer that nation approaches the true social idea, which is strength by means of order. Therefore, marriage is right; and you may, with my entire approbation, marry Mlle. de Férias, if your heart tells you to do so."

"Had you met her before at my cousin's house?" asked the Count.

"Frequently."

"And how was it that you never spoke to me about her?"

"Why should I have spoken of her?"

"Is it possible you did not recognize in her the little fairy by the fountain, about whom I have so often talked to you, and also the crowned Sibylle of my portfolio?"

"Really, is it she? But how could I have recognized her?"

"Because she is the living portrait — of her portrait."

"All imagination!" said Gandrax, laughing heartily; "at any rate, my friend, I am delighted that she pleases you; but I must frankly tell you our tastes differ here. Explain to me her attraction, for I do not understand it."

Raoul stopped, and looked at him in astonishment. "My poor Louis," said he, "must I describe it by mathematical rules, and give exact reasons? I feel that Mlle. de Férias has been created for me — for my eyes, for my soul, for my heart forever! You know how strangely my meeting with that lovely child occupied my thoughts during so many years. I have confided to you the fanciful reveries which the remembrance of

her inspired in me. She was to me like the marble statue of which the sculptor in ancient story became enamored. In my imagination I endowed her with all the graces and all the virtues ; I pictured to myself the gradual development of all her loveliness. I dedicated to her image all the tenderness of my heart, all the ennobling and elevating feelings of my soul. Judge, then, what I experienced to-night when I met her again, when I saw that my dream had been more than realized, when I found her worthy of all the devotion, all the homage, I could lay at her feet."

"Be it so!" said Gandrax. "I love you for telling me all this so frankly, and without any false pride. Marry her, then, and I shall never feel tempted to become your rival. She is handsome, I acknowledge ; but her beauty is like an object of art, which says nothing to me."

"I suppose," said Raoul, smiling, "you would prefer Mme. de Val-Chesnay."

"Yes, sincerely, I would. She is a beautiful woman, the incarnation of matter under the most splendid form. Thus Eve must have appeared to the first man in the virgin solitudes of Eden."

"Louis, you do not know it, but I see you are very much in love. You really, for the first time, speak in poetry. But Eve was a blonde."

"No," said Gandrax, "Eve was a brunette, and she spoke Sanscrit."

"And soon you will speak Sanscrit to Mme. de Val-Chesnay."

"No," replied Gandrax, impressively, "I will not, because I do not choose. One can do what one will. My will is to work, and I am going to do it. Good night!"

## VII.

### THE STUDIO.

THE next morning when Sibylle, accompanied by Miss O'Neil, appeared at the breakfast-table, she saw at once, by the expression of her grandfather's face, that he had already been informed of the occurrences of the previous evening. In fact, at an early hour the Countess had confided to him the expectations which the devotion paid to Sibylle by the Count de Chalys had excited in her mind. When Sibylle entered the room, he affected to frown.

"Do not approach me, mademoiselle ; do not approach me !"

"What do you mean ?" murmured Sibylle, blushing.

He laughed, and kissed her ; the breakfast hour passed gayly ; and when the servants had left the room, the Count said, "You have no appetite this morning, my child ; the sign of a bad conscience. Tell me, Miss O'Neil, did you know it, — yes or no ?"

"Know what, sir ?"

"Did you know that this unprincipled young person had exchanged vows of love with an unknown stranger in the woods ?"

"O grandfather !" said Sibylle.

"Well, that is what I have been

told, at least; happily, marriage can repair everything."

"Dear grandfather, you are in too great haste."

"What! will you not marry him, then? Miss O'Neil, I compliment you on the morality of your pupil."

Sibylle put her arms round him.

"Do not tease me so," said she.

"Agreed, if you will promise to marry him."

"Promise to marry a gentleman, whom I have seen only twice in my life, and whom I may never see again?"

"I tell you, you will see him to-day. Is this not your grandmother's day?"

"He does not know anything about that."

"He will come, I tell you. I can predict it all for you. He will come between four and five in the afternoon, so as to preserve a happy medium between too great eagerness and indifference. He will show you his portfolio, and you will begin to blush, ditto the sensitive Miss O'Neil, as you remark the fidelity of his memory, evinced by his sketch of yourself; he will ask to see your drawings, and while you utter a timid refusal, Miss O'Neil will go and fetch them; here the Count will be in ecstasies, the young lady will blush again, ditto Miss O'Neil. Then—ah! then you will begin to speak of his sketches of Eastern travel, of which you have heard so much. He certainly will not fail to beg you, some day as you are passing, to do him the honor and pleasure of visit-

ing his studio. Miss O'Neil will blush more than ever, and you will look at your grandmother with amiable uncertainty. Your grandmother will say that the genius of the Count makes him, as it were, a public character, and that under her wing and protection she considers this visit may be made. In a short time he will solicit the favor of making a portrait of you, and when it is finished—he will leave the picture with us, and carry off the original. There is your history, young lady." The Count rose, and pressing his granddaughter to his heart added, in a serious tone: "My dear child, nothing would give me greater pleasure."

"You are a darling grandfather," said Sibylle, "but a very imprudent one. The Count de Chalys really does appear to me the most distinguished and agreeable man I have met with in society; but for that very reason you should beware of filling my head with such ideas, for it is quite possible that, notwithstanding his attentions last evening, the idea of marrying me may never have entered his mind."

"Undoubtedly it is possible. In that case, so much the worse for him! But I can talk in this way to you because you are a wise little girl, Sibylle, and I do not think that in one night your predilection for M. de Chalys can have assumed any very formidable proportions. Good by, my child." And the Count went for his walk on the Boulevard and his daily visit at the club, which evolutions only the state of his health,

or an earthquake, would have been sufficient to prevent.

M. de Vergnes left his granddaughter much more agitated and troubled than it was possible for him to imagine; for he knew nothing of the cherished memories and of the profound and delicate presentiments which had prepared and increased, between Sibylle and Raoul, the sympathy which he supposed to be only the consequence of their meeting the night before.

In reality, their souls, both filled with lofty imaginings, and both united by a far-off memory, had, for years past, been drawn together by a mysterious inclination, and their first meeting had caused a shock of emotion which naturally kindled the flame of love.

These instances of sudden attachments, which are explained by powerful affinities and deep mutual sympathies, are, doubtless, exceptional ones; but neither, on the other hand, are they so rare in real life as not to fall within the province of the novelist, since exceptional circumstances, which he can invest with the interest and dignity of truth, are most frequently what are required for his task.

Mlle. de Férias could not herself conceive the depth of the impression which their interview of the previous evening had left upon the mind of the Count de Chalys. To her it appeared probable that M. de Chalys would scarcely think again of what might be to him only a trifling incident in the life of a man of the

world. How she wished she knew his secret thoughts! Raoul had the same feelings as Sibylle, and with an additional cause for anxiety. Sibylle, at least, could have no doubts as to the admiration with which she had inspired M. de Chalys, her womanly instinct could not mistake the fact, although it left her in doubt as to the extent and degree to which it might be carried; but M. de Chalys, who had passed hours in recalling to himself all the words uttered by Sibylle, all the intonations of her voice, all the expressions of her countenance, had, by a process of induction known only to lovers, arrived at the absurd conclusion that she had not been pleased with him, and when, at last, he fell asleep, it was in a sorrowful state of mind.

The next day, however, he took a less gloomy view of matters. His residence was in the street St. Dominique, Saint Germain, and had the advantage of a garden. It was early April; the trees were in blossom, and the birds were singing. The Count, too, sang as he gathered some violets, which he threw away. Soon he went to his studio and opened the portfolio which contained the portraits of Sibylle. He completed the likeness of the last one by a few touches, and then, after contemplating it in silence, he murmured, in a low tone, "My wife!" The word brought a smile to his face, then he grew pensive again; his foolish fears had returned.

"Yes," said he to himself, "she certainly did not like me; I am

too old, I suppose. Well, I must work."

He prepared his palette, singing as he did so. Suddenly he took off the easel the picture on which he had been working, replaced it by a new canvas, and began to sketch a full-length portrait of Mlle. de Férias by the rock.

He had taken pains to ascertain, the night before, that Tuesday was Mme. de Vergnes's day at home; nevertheless, he determined to delay his visit until the following Tuesday, were it only to display towards Mlle. de Férias a magnanimous indifference. However, towards four o'clock he abruptly put down his palette, and proceeded to dress. Twenty minutes later, he got out of his carriage at the door of the Hôtel de Vergnes, his portfolio in his hand.

Women, even those of the most frank natures, habituated from childhood to control their feelings and conceal their emotions, have on occasions like these a marked advantage over men, even of those who are more experienced in the ways of the world. When M. de Chalys, pale and agitated, presented himself in the drawing-room, where Sibylle was seated between Mme. de Vergnes and Miss O'Neil, he was far from pleased with the appearance of calmness and ease with which she returned his salutation, although the young girl herself felt as if she could hear the roaring of the ocean in her ears. This painful impression of the Count was only increased in the course of his visit; notwith-

standing which, the programme which the imagination of M. de Vergnes had sketched in the morning was so fully carried out, that when at last Raoul asked Mme. de Vergnes to favor him with a visit to his studio, Sibylle could not refrain from a glance directed to Miss O'Neil and a slight smile. M. de Chalys perceived this, and it disconcerted him extremely. In vain Mme. de Vergnes promised to come to his studio on her first leisure day; he retired, dissatisfied with the interview, with himself, and above all with Mlle. de Férias.

"Well," said he to himself, as he returned home, with a feeling of gloom and depression on his mind, — "well, it is, I suppose, natural that I should not please her! if there be only one woman in ten thousand a man desires to please, fate ordains commonly that she dislikes him; but why I should appear ridiculous to her, why she should laugh at me, — for I saw the satirical glance she exchanged with her governess, — this I do not understand. I hate that mocking spirit in a young girl; it is a sign of natural malevolence, and of a cold heart. However, it was to be expected this young creature should have some faults, — without them she would be too perfect. How beautiful she is! how graceful and harmonious are all her movements! It is the poetry of grace! And withal so superior a mind! her opinions so just and so lucid! Only the heart is wanting. Well, I must think no more of her, and go to dinner."

And he went to dine at his club, and in the evening, contrary to his usual habits, he played high, and lost a large sum of money.

The following evening, after a day which seemed to him interminable, he fortunately happened to remember that Mme. de Vergnes had a box at the opera ; and he went there.

He soon encountered the eyes of Sibylle, but she turned them quickly away when she perceived him. He resumed a little of his interest in life. They played the Huguenots. He waited until the end of the third act before presenting himself in the box of Mme. de Vergnes, who was alone with her granddaughter. Mlle. de Férias extended her hand with a grave familiarity which delighted him. She said but little, but when, after a short time, he rose to go, "Are you going?" said she, as if surprised. And he remained.

The fourth act of the Huguenots commenced.

Although M. de Chalys knew the music by heart, he felt as if he were hearing it for the first time. The melodious strains, so full of grandeur and passion, seemed to reach his soul through the medium of another soul in sympathy with his own, and to fill him with new emotions. Seated behind the chair of Sibylle, a powerful magnetism seemed to unite his being with that of this adorable creature. The tresses which escaped from her comb, the flowers she wore in her hair, the rosy marble of her beautiful shoulders, — all seemed instinct with the powerful charm which

drew him to her. Although she had uttered no word to dissipate his doubts and fears of the previous evening, still they had all vanished ; he felt with a strange certainty that he was loved, and all this magnificent music, the voices of the chorus, and the harmonies of the orchestra, were, for him, and for Sibylle also, the echo of the hymn of love which their two hearts were singing. He was therefore not so much surprised as delighted when, towards the end of the act, as the two lovers pour forth their anguish in a celestial melody, Mlle. de Férias suddenly turned towards him her beaming eyes, with a sad and almost tender expression, and said, "You are happy, are you not?"

"From the depths of my soul, mademoiselle," answered he.

And the expression of his words and looks was such, that Mlle. de Férias turned her eyes again towards the Raoul of the time of Charles IX.

When the act was over, M. de Chalys took his leave, and retired to meditate alone upon the impressions of the evening. These favorable impressions were confirmed by occasional little notes, sent him from time to time, by way of encouragement, by his cousin Blanche. He went sometimes to see the young Duchess, and on one of these occasions had the happiness of meeting Sibylle ; and the manner of the young girl, her timid and pleased expression, her seemingly diminished pride, were even more satisfactory than the mysterious notes of the Duchess. He did not fail to

call upon Mme. de Vergnes the following Tuesday, and she then promised to visit him the next day with her granddaughter. During the morning Raoul employed himself in decorating his studio with rare flowers and tropical plants, which he arranged with the anxiety of a lover and the taste of an artist. This magnificent display enchanted Mme. de Vergnes, and rather appeared to disquiet Sibylle, as they entered the perfumed temple. The Count did the honors of his sanctum with the graceful elegance natural to him, and with the simplicity of a man of genius. Mlle. de Férias, wandering among the labyrinth of green, seemed to him like a muse in a sacred grove. Suddenly she perceived the sketch of her portrait in a niche, decorated with flowers almost like a shrine, and she blushed. Raoul obtained from her a promise to give him some sittings in order to finish it. Then they visited the garden of the hôtel, where a collation was served under the shade of the trees, and when they parted it was with the best understanding for the present and the most flattering expectations for the future.

Early the next morning Raoul received from his cousin Blanche a note, inviting him to dine on the following Monday with her mother, Mme. de Guy-Ferrand.

"You will meet," wrote the Duchess, "your friend Gandrax, and my friend Sibylle." The truth was, Blanche had confided to her mother her plans for Sibylle and Raoul, and

Mme. de Guy-Ferrand, who, like most women, considered it a sacred duty to marry as many people as possible, had immediately determined to help on the affair by inviting them to a small and sociable dinner-party.

In fact, this dinner-party appeared to all the parties interested a sort of a decisive event, in the present state of affairs.

The visit to the studio had been of a character which could scarcely leave any doubt as to the wishes and intentions of M. de Chalys. A marriage between him and Mlle. de Férias appeared in every respect so entirely suitable, their tastes were so congenial, and their position one which so completely removed all the obstacles which sometimes intervene in such cases, that a speedy conclusion to the affair appeared inevitable. Raoul himself felt that candor and respect would not permit him to delay much longer a formal declaration of his sentiments, and he was preparing to confer with Mme. de Guy-Ferrand upon the steps proper to be taken to secure the hand and heart of Mlle. de Férias.

Mlle. de Férias, however, notwithstanding this satisfactory state of things, was far from feeling perfectly happy. The more she loved, and the more she felt herself beloved, the more she thought of the one obstacle which might have the power of separating her forever from Raoul. In her elevated although tender nature, passion could never conquer principle. Deeply convinced of the evanescent nature of all attachments in

which the religious element is wanting, she had resolved never to marry a man who did not partake her religious convictions, and she would have despised herself if the weakness of her heart could have induced her to break this solemn determination. What, on these points, were the principles of M. de Chalys, Sibylle did not know. No one had enlightened her on the subject, and she had not been in haste to ascertain the truth, whether from some secret presentiment of evil, or from that feeling of trust which endows a beloved being with all the qualities we desire he should possess; but when she began to see that the love and devotion of Raoul were likely to end in a speedy declaration and offer of his hand, she began to feel anxious as to her want of information on this point.

Her apprehensions were allayed when she thought of the noble sentiments and the generous enthusiasm of the Count. To her the poetical temperament appeared so nearly allied to the religious, and the love of the beautiful so much to resemble the love of God, that she could not suspect him of real impiety; only the recollection of his great intimacy with the atheist, Gandrax, when it crossed her mind, gave her a feeling of anxiety of which she could not divest herself. These perplexities cast a shade of sadness over the brow of Sibylle, as, at the table of Mme. de Guy-Ferrand, she took the place reserved for her between the Duke de Sauves and the Count de Chalys.

Mme. de Guy-Ferrand was a woman of a keen and liberal mind. She liked to have around her a circle composed of men distinguished in the world of politics, of science, and of art. Her habitual mode of entertaining was by giving dinners, when she would assemble such men round her table, and listen to their discussions on things divine and human, spiritual and temporal, while her exquisite *cuisine* certainly did not diminish their enjoyment.

Louis Gandrax had taken a prominent place among her habitual guests, both on account of his own merit and of his great intimacy with M. de Chalys. During the long absence of Raoul the acquaintance between Gandrax and Mme. de Guy-Ferrand became still more intimate by the constant interchange of letters and news in regard to the absent traveller. Nevertheless, the aunt of Raoul felt towards Gandrax a species of hostility which women frequently manifest towards scientific men,—probably because science, being apart from sensibility and imagination, which are the prominent faculties in women, has nothing to do with love, the most interesting subject in their eyes. In reality, Mme. de Guy-Ferrand detested, almost as much as the old Duchess de Sauves, the philosophical theories of the young scholar, but she liked to hear them discussed, and to refute them herself by some retaliating impertinence.

She attacked him on this occasion, when the dinner was about half over, on the subject of a late scientific



discovery of which he was the author. At first she begged him to explain to her the principles and application of it; and she listened with a slightly ironical attention to the words of Gandrax, while he undertook to demonstrate the great results of the new force which it supplied to the use of human industry, and when he had finished she said, "Well, and then?"

"How, and then? Pardon me, madame, I do not understand the objection."

"Will it make this poor world happier, my friend?"

"Madame, I presume you agree that two and two make four, and that a progress is a progress."

"Progress is indefinite," said Mme. de Guy-Ferrand; "there are different kinds of progress. There may be a fortunate one, a deplorable, or an indifferent one; I trust, at least, yours may be of the number of the latter."

Gandrax slightly shook his head with the supreme but irritated contempt of a lion stung by an insect.

"Madame," returned he, "let us understand each other. If your objection be founded upon the want of merit in my invention, I have nothing to say; but if, as I suspect, you do me the honor to attack, in my humble person, science itself, its uses and its benefits, I must beg you to consider the consequences of your reasoning. You must then dispute all the advantages of modern science in its manifold applications to industry and art; you must repudiate

the great discoveries which are the honor of the age, you must ignore all that they are continually adding to the happiness and the elevation of our race; you must boldly proclaim that comfort substituted for hardships all over the face of the globe, light replacing chaos, the labors of man lightened, famine conquered, physical life doubled, and intellectual life infinitely multiplied,—in fact, that all our glorious civilization,—are things indifferent in your eyes; and that the savage, dwelling in swamps and forests, and the serf of the Middle Ages, a slave to the soil, form your *beau idéal* of human greatness and felicity."

The approving murmurs of the assembly appeared to sustain the side of Gandrax; but Mme. de Guy-Ferrand did not give up.

"For my part," said she, quietly, "I do not see that railways, electrical telegraphs, or the art of photography, have added to my felicity. The railway-whistle grates upon my nerves day and night; the telegraph alarms me whenever I receive a despatch, even if it be intended to reassure me; and photographs make me look horribly ugly. But you will say I am an aristocrat, and belong to the privileged classes, and that this is a question of the happiness of humanity in general, and not of my private convenience. Well, my friend, I am sorry to tell you, that even from this point of view, in the Middle Ages, the masses, as they are called, were much happier than they are at present."

"Ah, madame," said Gandrax, "allow me to drink to your very good health!"

"I am convinced of this," repeated Mme. de Guy-Ferrand; "it is my opinion."

"Your opinion! Just like a woman; but give me a reason."

"Well then, in the Middle Ages there were no scholars."

"I beg your pardon, madame; the difference was, they burned them."

"And they did right!" cried Mme. de Guy-Ferrand, encouraged by the laughter of the company; "and then, the Middle Ages were times of poetry and romance."

"Alas! my dear madame, if you could resuscitate one of the happy mortals of that romantic and poetical age, and seat him at a modern table, he would think himself in paradise!"

"No!" returned Mme. de Guy-Ferrand, quickly; "he would say, take me back to my privations, and to the God who consoled me under them!"

Sibylle who had listened to this discussion, exchanging smiles with her neighbor Raoul, shook her head approvingly at the last words of Mme. de Guy-Ferrand. Raoul eagerly took the side favored by Mlle. de Férias. He now spoke. "Pardon me, Louis," said he to Gandrax, "but my aunt is right."

Gandrax looked at him in astonishment. "Are you sure?" said he.

"Certainly, it is evident," said Raoul. "What is my aunt's position? She does not pretend to deny the material greatness of the present age."

"Certainly not," said Mme. de Guy-Ferrand.

"She merely inquires to what extent this greatness has contributed to the real happiness of humanity."

"That is it."

"Well, in reality it has contributed to nothing."

"Horrible!" said Gandrax.

"I will convince you of it. Come now, is it not true that physical comfort and material enjoyments are not only the lowest form of happiness which man can enjoy, but also the kind which satisfies him least, and wearies him soonest? This you cannot deny without denying the dignity of human nature. Well, all that Science gives us is, the comfort and security of physical well-being, while she takes from us the life of the soul, of sentiment and imagination, which constitutes the true and essential happiness of man. Look fairly at the life of a man of the Middle Ages, even among the class of the very poor. How many moral compensations were there to counterbalance his physical disadvantages, — interests, joys, and ecstasies, which are unknown to us, save through the accounts of the ancient chroniclers. This man possessed, not only in his faith, but even in his superstitions, an inexhaustible store of hopes, of dreams, of moral emotions, which gave to his life an intensity which we can scarcely conceive. The material world was hard, it is true, but he scarcely lived in it; he was always escaping from it. If his feet wore chains, his soul had wings. He

had ever displayed before his eyes God, the angels, the saints, the magnificence of worship, the luminous vision of paradise always half opened above his head ; in him were strongly developed all natural feelings, love, reverence, faith, patriotism. And more than this, his imagination peopled the unknown world around him. Around his hearth-stone, in the woods and fields, a company of supernatural beings surrounded him, and made of his life a legend, a romance, a continual poem, of a sweet or terrible interest. Thus, this man, ragged, hungry, weary, must have been happier in life and in death than the well-clothed and well-paid workman of the present time who has lost his faith in God, who believes neither in angels nor fairies, who works on Sunday and perhaps gets drunk on Monday. The former man was happy in this, — that he knew nothing of ennui, which poisons the pretended benefits of our generation. Machines can supply daily bread, but not what we most need, the food of the soul." Raoul at first had spoken in a jesting tone, but he had become warned by his subject, and his eloquent speech elicited general applause, and especially from Mme. de Guy-Ferrand.

"A brilliant variation on a paradox, dedicated to the ladies!" said Gandrax, coldly.

Raoul was sufficiently consoled for the ironical reproach conveyed by the tone of his friend, by the delighted expression which he saw in the face of his young neighbor.

"Nephew," resumed Mme. de Guy-Ferrand, "I not only thank you for the eloquence with which you have sustained my cause, but also for having removed from my mind a doubt which pained me much. I ask pardon of M. Gandrax. He knows I have a great regard for him, and that I tolerate his impiety with affectionate compassion, because I consider it a sort of professional infirmity ; but sometimes I have feared you might have the same fault, without the same excuse. And now, after all you have just said, I am thankful to feel that there is no danger of your being classed with those men who, in these degenerate times, worship nothing, and never pray."

Raoul at first only answered this appropriate address by an equivocal smile ; but, meeting the cold and severe eye of Gandrax fixed upon him, he felt it would be cowardly to allow his friend to bear all the sweeping condemnation of Mme. de Guy-Ferrand.

"My dear aunt," said he, "this conversation appears to me inopportune ; however, if you condemn sceptics, I presume you have a still worse opinion of hypocrites, and I fear I should deserve to be called one if I did not endeavor to rectify the conclusions you have drawn from the language I have just used. If I know and deplore the disadvantages of the age, it is because I partake of them myself ; and I regret to tell you that I have the same claims as my friend Louis upon your affectionate compassion. To pretend to wor-

ship a Being in whom, unfortunately, I do not believe —”

“Pardon me,” interrupted Gandrax, abruptly rising, “Mlle. de Férias is ill.”

And Raoul, turning towards Sibylle, saw her lying back in her chair, pale as a corpse, and supported by the Duke de Sauves. The ladies rose; the young girl was carried fainting from the room. Gandrax followed, to give his professional assistance. In a few moments he returned to the drawing-room where the guests, who had left the table, were now assembled. To the eager questions which greeted him, he replied with his usual coolness, “It is nothing; a fainting-fit from the heat; a slight indisposition.”

The general conversation, which had been for a moment suspended by this unfortunate incident, now revived; M. de Chalys alone did not join in it. He appeared thoughtful, and when, a little later, Mme. de Guy-Ferrand rejoined the party, he hastened to approach her.

“She is better, is she not?” said he.

She looked at him, shook her head, and did not reply.

Raoul seated himself at a table, and began to turn over the leaves of a book with an absent air. At the end of half an hour, the young Duchess de Sauves also appeared; she was very pale. She replied smilingly to the questions addressed to her on her entrance; then she went and took a seat beside Raoul.

“Well?” said he.

“Well, your impiety has ruined everything; she leaves Paris to-morrow for Férias. You will never see her again.”

The young Duchess regretted the bitter and angry tone in which she had spoken, when she saw the effect her words produced upon the Count. A livid hue overspread his countenance, and he gave her a look of inexpressible anguish, then cast down his eyes, while his lips moved convulsively.

“My friend,” said she more gently, “can you do nothing to repair this? A word would suffice.”

“A lie?” said the young man, looking at her with eyes filled with a gloomy fire. “Never!”

After a short silence, “Blanche,” added he, rising suddenly, “be sure of this, that I shall bless you all my life long for what you have done, and for what you have tried to do. Adieu!”

He made a sign to Gandrax, who had been looking anxiously towards him, and quietly left the room. Gandrax rejoined him in the ante-chamber. As they were putting on their overcoats, “You understand it?” said Raoul, in a low tone.

“Yes,” replied Gandrax.

Madame de Guy-Ferrand lived in the Rue Saint Dominique, not far from the Hôtel de Chalys. They reached the house without exchanging a word.

“Come in,” said the Count, and led the way to the studio.

The studio was still adorned with plants and flowers, and looked as if

prepared for a *fête*. Raoul pushed a chair towards Gandrax, who seated himself, and then he began to pace with a rapid step the vast apartment, now and then stopping to pluck a bunch of flowers, and then throwing it on the floor. Suddenly he stopped before the portrait of Sibylle, which appeared like a pale phantom amidst the hanging green; he seized his palette-knife, and threw it violently against the canvas, which was cut across, and showed a large wound in the place where the heart would be. Gandrax rose, took the hand of Raoul, and said, "Do not! my friend, I beg of you to be calm."

Raoul at first angrily repulsed him, then threw himself into his arms, and sobbed. "Ah," said he, "I loved her like a child!"

He threw himself into a chair, and, completely overwhelmed, sat for a long time with his head in his hands.

Then he rose, and briefly said, "I remember this is Monday. I shall go to Mme. de Val-Chesnay's; will you come?"

"And what are you going to do at Mme. de Val-Chesnay's?" inquired Gandrax.

"I am going to tell her I love her; and I will love her! I need something to divert my mind, and I see nothing better. Therefore I will be-

gin to-night to pay my court to Clotilde; in two months I will carry her off from her husband; we will fight a duel, and I will kill him. And I hope the news will reach the pious ears of Mlle. de Férias. Will you come with me?"

"Raoul," said Gandrax, with singular emotion, "if you are my friend, and if you wish to remain so, you will not do this."

"I swear I will do it; the moment is badly chosen for moral arguments; and, Louis, you would waste your time by urging them upon me. I suffer tortures, and why? Because I aspired to the purest happiness. No! do not speak to me; not a word more. I will become the lover of Mme. de Val-Chesnay or of whomsoever I choose, and there is no reason on earth or in heaven which can prevent me!"

"There is one, I hope," returned Gandrax, "and this is it, — I love Mme. de Val-Chesnay."

"What! you are in love! you love her!" Raoul had stopped in front of his friend; he gazed at him as if in a stupor, then answered, calmly, "You are right. That is a reason, the only one! Love her, then, but I pity you!"

Gandrax did not reply; he pressed the hand of the Count, and left him.

## PART III.

## I.

## THE RETURN TO FÉRIAS.

THOSE who have not forgotten the anxious feelings which filled the mind of Sibylle, when she took her place at the table of Mme. de Guy-Ferrand, will understand with what interest and with what a sensation of relief she had followed the words of Raoul, in the discussion into which he had been drawn. A mind as pure and upright as was that of Mlle. de Férias might well interpret the enthusiastic although somewhat vague expressions of the Count as the evidence of a religious faith, which, even if for the time estranged from the practices of devotion, might easily be led back to the path of duty. At that moment the doubts and fears of the young girl were removed, and she saw in imagination the fulfilment of all her dreams of a happy future. The expressions of an impious non-belief, which immediately afterwards escaped from the Count, fell, therefore, on her ears, like the sound of a thunderbolt in the midst of the serenity of a cloudless sky. A single word had opened, between her and the man she loved, an abyss which she had sworn to herself never to cross. The shock was too sudden and violent for her nerves to sustain, and she fainted.

When, after being carried to the boudoir, her consciousness returned, and she thought of the utter ruin of

her hopes, she could have wished to close her eyes forever. She did not, however, shed a tear or utter a complaint. When left alone with her grandmother and her friend Blanche, she simply said, in a few words, that, with her principles, she could not marry a man who was a stranger to all moral and religious belief, and she begged them to speak to her no more of a marriage which in every other respect could have made her happy. She also expressed a desire to leave Paris next day for the quiet of Férias, where she would be more likely to be able to regain her composure of mind under so bitter a trial.

When she reached the Hôtel de Vergnes, she had to undergo an angry reprimand from her grandfather, who pronounced her conduct childish and narrow-minded, and added, that, by her absurd pretensions, Mlle. de Férias would inevitably condemn herself to a single life.

She calmly and respectfully answered, that she much preferred a single life to becoming a deceived and unhappy wife.

M. de Vergnes grew more angry. "But who has told you he was deceiving you? What! a man of so much merit experiences for you an almost absurd passion, and your first idea is that he will deceive you,—that he will make you unhappy! It is unjust and absurd."

She replied with the same firmness, that a passion not sanctified by re-

ligious faith could only be a passing caprice, which she felt sure would not prove a lasting attachment.

The Count de Vergnes, somewhat touched by this, answered more gently, "Very well, my poor child; let us say no more about it. It will, I fear, be difficult to find any one to suit you."

Miss O'Neil understood her better. She had so identified her life with that of her pupil that she shared all the bitterness of her disappointment. Alarmed at the repressed but profound sadness of the young girl, she was very desirous that she should return immediately to Férias, and she succeeded, after much opposition, in persuading M. and Mme. de Vergnes to consent to their departure on the following day. Sibylle passed a sleepless night. All her dreams and expectations, and all the past incidents of her love, now so cruelly wounded, presented themselves to her mind with a vivid reality and a strange persistence. This love, which in the eyes of others had been of so short a duration, to her dated from her childhood, from the rock at Férias. It had been the dream of her heart, long almost unknown to herself. It appeared to her to have filled her life, and now to have left her nothing to take its place.

With the injustice of passion, she exaggerated the faults of Raoul, and almost believed his conduct to her had been premeditated, and that he had only in jest played the part of a believer, in order to mock her by showing himself afterwards in his

true colors as a sceptic. The greatest suffering, to one of so strong a will as this young girl, was to find that her love triumphed over her reason, and that this man, whom her judgment condemned, remained master of her heart. She left early the next morning. Her grandmother's grief at parting with her brought no tears to her eyes. During all the journey she preserved the same cold and calm appearance. In the evening her unexpected arrival at Férias filled the Marquis and Marchioness with a surprise mingled with anxiety. She smilingly told them she had experienced a disappointment in consequence of her romantic expectations, and that she had come to them for consolation. She begged them to excuse her from saying more at present, but said they would hear all from Miss O'Neil. She inquired with a sort of feverish excitement about people and things at Férias, and then, pleading fatigue, she coldly received the kisses of her grandparents, and retired.

The alteration in Sibylle's appearance, her icy indifference, and her singular manner of speaking, had filled M. and Mme. de Férias with alarm. They questioned Miss O'Neil with agonized looks. The poor Irish lady could scarcely speak, for her tears; when she recovered herself sufficiently to give them the history of the brief love-affair of Sibylle and the Count de Chalys, and of the courage she had shown in renouncing her happiness to satisfy her conscience, M. de Férias raised his eyes towards

heaven. "Poor child!" said he, "I had foreseen it. As always, her dream of perfection! always the swan!"

The next day they manifested their sympathy with Sibylle's grief only by redoubled tenderness and caresses. She appeared to appreciate their reserve, and made, herself, no allusion to the cause of her sadness. This sadness, however, continued to show itself in a way which alarmed M. de Férias. It was usually by a gloomy indifference, broken at intervals by a painful attempt at gayety. Her inner life so completely absorbed her mind, that she scarcely appeared even to see the things around her. She felt as if she had been left entirely alone, in some vast desert, where the sound of her own footsteps or her own voice appeared strange to her ears. M. de Férias said to the Marchioness, "If she would only shed a few tears"; but nothing seemed to awaken her interest or her sensibility. Not even the sight of the gravestones of her parents elicited from her any signs of emotion; and when, a few days after her return, they took her to the parsonage, the tender greeting of the old priest was received by Sibylle with the same cold indifference.

The Marchioness of Férias thought of a singular expedient. She secretly sent a servant to inform Jacques Féray, in his solitary hut, that Sibylle had returned to the castle. Jacques Féray received this message with profound incredulity, and even assumed a threatening attitude towards the messenger. The fact was,

since Sibylle's departure the mischievous boys of the neighborhood had been in the habit of amusing themselves by frequently announcing to him the return of the young girl, for whom they well knew his extraordinary attachment. Twenty times he had been duped by this story, and, although convinced that it was a falsehood, he never failed to come to the castle to make sure whether it were so or not. This day the same thing happened, and although he declared he did not believe mademoiselle had returned, still he took the road to Férias through the woods, and on his way gathered a quantity of primroses, periwinkles, and wild violets, of which he made an enormous bouquet. The Férias family were returning in a carriage from the parsonage, when the Marchioness perceived the madman jumping across a ditch to the high road.

"My child," said she to Sibylle, "do not show yourself."

Then, stopping the carriage, she called to Jacques to come to her. He approached slowly, his bouquet in his hand, and looking right and left to see who was in the carriage. "For whom is this beautiful bouquet, Jacques?" said the Marchioness.

He did not answer, but shook his head sorrowfully, as if to say, "No, it cannot be!" When he came quite near, the Marchioness said to Sibylle, "Look at him."

The young girl then showed herself, smiled, and spoke to him. He made a movement as if to present



the bouquet to Sibylle, but it escaped from his hand. He fell on his knees, and while his eyes were fixed on Sibylle, with an expression of ineffable delight, large tears like drops of rain poured down his emaciated face, and left their traces in the dust of the road.

This unexpected scene moved Sibylle. She signed to him to give her the bouquet.

"Thank you, Jacques!" murmured she, trying to smile; but her smile was drowned in a torrent of tears. She threw herself back in the carriage, buried her face in the flowers, and sobbed violently, pressing her hand on her heart.

The crisis was salutary. The painful rigidity of her features relaxed, and she resumed her former affectionate intercourse with her family and her old friends, with her naturally sweet and gentle manner, only with a more marked gravity than she had used to manifest.

She now seemed to take pleasure in recalling the memories of her childhood and early youth, and would visit all the spots associated with them. Nature has a store of consolations for the unhappy; the solitude of the woods, the sight of the rocks and of the ocean, seemed to her filled with a sad sympathy which soothed the bitterness of her grief.

The true source of her consolation, however, was a higher one. The God to whom she had been so faithful did not desert her.

For those who believe, there may be deep afflictions, but there cannot

be despair. If happiness be denied them here, they know it is in reserve for them elsewhere; if the earth refuse it, heaven promises it to them forever. Mlle. de Férias did not deceive herself as to the extent of her misfortune; she knew her own heart well enough to feel sure that no second attachment would replace the first love of her young life. She recalled all the great gifts of mind and person with which Raoul was endowed,—his distinguished appearance, his cultivated and enlarged intellect, his graces of manner,—and she felt that her love for him, so cruelly disappointed and deceived, would be the only one of her existence. Therefore, in giving up Raoul, Sibylle renounced all the charm of a woman's destiny, and it required all the fervor of her piety and her faith to enable her to contemplate with calmness the infinite desert which she saw spread out before her young eyes.

At first she was strongly tempted by the idea of a convent, but she gave it up, unwilling to afflict the heart of her grandparents merely for her own consolation; but she endeavored to give to her life a marked religious character.

In company with the Abbé Rénaud, she visited the poor, the afflicted, the sick, and the dying.

M. de Férias aided Sibylle in all these good works, by putting in her hands all the money she needed for her charitable efforts; and, although fond of quiet and order, he never complained of the crowd of beggars,

sick and unfortunate people of all kinds, which the renown of Sibylle's benevolence drew to the castle.

He also seconded her plans for the exterior restoration and the interior decoration of the church of Férias, and the old curé was enchanted when a carved pulpit and screen for the choir, carpets for the altar, and beautifully painted windows entirely transformed the little church, which to him was his dwelling, his country, and his world.

Another delightful surprise awaited him. A fine new organ was sent to him to be placed in the church; and the following Sunday Mlle. de Férias seated herself in front of it, and lent to the public worship the aid of her rare talent. Every Sunday she continued to play on the instrument, to the great delight of the little congregation, in whose eyes she appeared almost an angel.

Mlle. de Férias now thought of another plan which was destined to have strange results. She took pleasure in this work of adorning the sanctuary, although she disclaimed any religious merit in so doing, for thereby, she said, she only gratified her artistic tastes; and now she wished to have the ceiling and walls of the church painted in fresco. When she timidly confided to her grandfather this new fancy, the good old man began to laugh.

"Frescos!" said he; "very well, provided they do not cost too much, as I am not quite made of gold. Do you know anything about the

price of fresco painting? Would three or four thousand francs be enough?"

"Not quite," said Sibylle.

"Well, then, eight thousand, but we will not spend more than that; we must keep something in reserve for the mosaic pavement which I foresee in the distance."

Since her return to Férias, Sibylle had kept up a regular correspondence with the young Duchess de Sauves, who was warmly devoted to her. The name of the Count de Chalys was never mentioned by either in their letters; but, with this exception, there was perfect unreserve between them, and Blanche was delighted to execute any little commissions for her friend. Sibylle, therefore, when she had obtained her eight thousand francs, hastened to write to the Duchess, and begged her to try and find some young artist of talent, who might be willing for the price named to undertake the work, sending her at the same time the plan and dimensions of the church.

When the letter reached Blanche, she had been for about a month at the Castle de Sauves; after reflecting a moment, a smile came to her lips as a feminine idea crossed her mind; she enclosed the letter in an envelope, adding a few lines from her own pen, and directing the whole to the Count de Chalys, who was also now established for the summer at his residence at Fontainebleau, where he lived in great retirement. Raoul was somewhat surprised at seeing the handwriting of the young Duch-

ess, whose note contained these words :—

"Cousin, you know more about these matters than I do. If you can find a young man, let me know."

Two days later, Blanche received from the Count the following reply :—

"COUSIN BLANCHE :—The young man is found ; he will leave in a fortnight. Write to them to have the walls plastered and prepared. I enclose some directions on the subject. Respectfully yours,

"RAOUL."

Sibylle immediately complied with the instructions sent by the Duchess, and the preliminary work was entirely finished, when one warm June evening the Abbé de Rénaud heard a carriage stop before the gate of his garden, and a man about thirty years of age, simply but elegantly dressed as a traveller, and who looked extremely pale, advanced towards him, and with a graceful but somewhat haughty bow said, "Monsieur le curé de Férias, I presume?"

"Yes, sir."

"You expect an artist for your church, sir?"

"Yes, sir," stammered the curé, a little intimidated by the distinguished appearance and dignified manner of the stranger; "yes, we expect a young painter, a young artist from Paris."

"I presume," returned the other, with a cold smile, "the bloom of youth is not an essential condition; at any rate, sir, I am the painter."

## II.

### RAOUL AT THE PARSONAGE.

M. DE CHALYS had passed two miserable months. At another time his dejection would have been consoled and sustained by the affection and the moral energy of Gandrax; but Gandrax was now in the full tide of one of those absorbing passions which sometimes seize upon the heart and soul of a not very young man for the first time in love. Leaving him entirely to the fascinations of Clotilde, Raoul left Paris; like Sibylle, he longed for solitude, but he did not find in it the same consolations. Nothing could fill the void in his heart; his wound seem to grow deeper. He found no relief in occupation; twenty times a day he would take up his brush, and put it down again. The memory of Sibylle, always present to his mind, raised in him a tumult of ideas, in which passion, anger, and regret in turn strove for the mastery. He had looked forward, in the love of this young girl, in their prospective union, in the future which opened before them, to the fulfilment of one of those dreams of peace, integrity, and moral elevation so grateful to minds unquiet and dissatisfied with themselves. The scruples which had caused Sibylle to put an end to this dream, and which he did not perfectly understand, often appeared to him childish, wretched, and even wicked; but when he had worked himself up to this point, the image of Mlle. de Férias would rise before his eyes, with her singular

grace and frankness, passion and purity, and he would at the same time curse and adore the fascinations of this charming and cruel child. Blanche's note had reached him when he was in this excited state of mind. The young Duchess had only sent it in a spirit of feminine mischief, and the extraordinary design it suggested to Raoul had never even entered her head. Before he had finished reading her note and the one enclosed his resolution was taken. He immediately returned to Paris to make some necessary preparations and some preliminary studies, and set out for Férias, torn by a thousand different feelings, of which the most frequent and the most prominent was an ironical and bitter despair.

This harsh feeling was visible in his tone, on the occasion of his first interview with the Abbé Rénaud; but his natural kindness of heart was awakened by the sight of the timid and benevolent aspect of the old man, who was soon won towards him by the polite and affectionate deference with which he endeavored to make amends for the haughty manner in which he had first spoken. The poor curé was greatly embarrassed when this elegant stranger asked him to be so kind as to direct him to some hotel in the village where he could find apartments during the time required for the completion of his labors.

"A hotel, sir? Marianne, the gentleman wants a hotel."

"If the gentleman wishes for a hotel," said Marianne, "he had better build one."

"Marianne, let us see, now. Alas! sir, we have only a miserable inn in the neighborhood. It is strange I never thought of this. But, sir, I have here in the parsonage a small room, very simple, it is true, but clean. If you would be willing to occupy it and to share my frugal table?"

"But, Monsieur le curé, I fear to inconvenience you. It would certainly give me much pleasure to become your guest, and if you will allow me to return your charity by accepting something for the poor—"

"O, sir! May I ask your name, sir?"

This question, so natural under the circumstances, had not been foreseen by Raoul; he hesitated, and in order to answer as nearly as possible to the truth, he took his title.

"Lecomte," said he.

"Well, then, my dear Monsieur Lecomte, I am sure we can arrange matters. But perhaps you are hungry, M. Lecomte?"

"I must confess that I am, sir; you see, I am going to give you trouble already."

"So much the better, so much the better, M. Lecomte. Marianne, wait a little to prepare the room. Kill a chicken."

"No, do not take the trouble; give me an omelette. I am sure Mlle. Marianne can make a delicious one."

Soon the Count de Chalys was seated at the little round table of the curé, and an omelette, and some cold meat, a bottle of old wine, and an

excellent cup of coffee, were placed before him.

Raoul, animated by some secret impulse, so exerted himself to please the curé that he soon gained the heart of the good old man, and even elicited a smile from the severe countenance of Marianne. The sympathetic feelings of the Count for the old man were greatly increased by the enthusiastic manner in which he continually spoke of Sibylle. "Sir," said he to the curé, as they rose from the table, "we shall be good friends, shall we not?"

"My dear sir, we are already, I trust."

"But, M. le curé, I do not wish to deceive you. I am not very devout."

"Well, M. Lecomte, neither was St. Paul at your age."

"That is true, M. le curé; but the times are different. However, will you allow me, M. le curé, to smoke in your garden?"

"In my garden, in your room, or in mine, — wherever you wish."

"Even in my kitchen," added Marianne.

It was now dark; but a clear moon shed its rays over the garden-walks, and bathed in silver light the spire of the little church built on an adjoining cliff. Raoul lighted a cigar, and gazed on this tranquil scene. The abbé was a little behind, when suddenly he turned, and called to him: "M. le curé, do I not hear music? Have you sirens on these shores? Listen."

"Ah," said the curé, "it is the organ of the church you hear, and

Mlle. Sibylle is playing it. She sometimes comes to practise what she is going to play on Sunday. I am glad she has come to-night, that I may announce to her your safe arrival."

"No, no," said he; "M. le curé, I beg of you not to tell her of my coming until I have begun my work. It will be an agreeable surprise to her to see it commenced."

"As you please, M. Lecomte; but on Sunday she will certainly come to mass."

"Well, this is Monday, and I shall have something sketched by that time. And now, with your permission, I will go and take a look at the sea from one of these cliffs. *Au revoir*, M. le curé."

Raoul at first moved slowly, but soon after leaving the garden he walked rapidly in the direction of the church, and, guided by the sounds of the organ, he approached one of the side windows. It was high, but he climbed up so as to look into the church. At first his eyes, dazzled by the bright moonlight, could scarcely distinguish anything, but after a little time he could perceive, by the dim light of the one lamp which hung from the ceiling, the figure of Sibylle, appearing through the darkness like a pale vision. Her bent head, her relaxed position, seemed to express a touching melancholy. She appeared to be improvising. Her fingers touched the keys with an uncertain inspiration, which sometimes expressed the enthusiasm of passion, and again a dreamy languor. Sud-

denly, while the organ was giving forth the tones of fervent aspiration and of painful regret, she raised her head and fixed her eyes on the window in front of her, from which Raoul was observing her. The window, being a dark painted one, prevented her from seeing anything but an indistinct form. Nevertheless, the young girl's hands suddenly quitted the instrument. She hastily rose as if astonished, while the sounds of the organ died away. Raoul instantly jumped down on the grass of the churchyard; his heart beat, and his first impulse was to fly, but his pride would not permit him to do so, and, concealing himself in an angle of the building, he waited. In a few minutes he heard the church door close, and almost immediately Sibylle's gentle voice said, "Is it you, Jacques?"

Not receiving any answer, the young girl quietly added, in a low tone, "I must have been dreaming."

Raoul, from the angle in which he stood, could see Mlle. de Férias walk away with a slow and uncertain step, her hat in one hand, and with the other holding up the skirt of her long riding-habit. When she reached the low wall which enclosed the churchyard on the side of the ocean, she stopped, and put on her hat, shaded by a long plume; then she climbed to a high point of the cliff, and stood for some moments gazing into the distance, her pure profile plainly defined in the transparent atmosphere; soon, however, she sprang

lightly down the cliff and disappeared.

Raoul then quitted his place of concealment, and, approaching the wall, he gazed over the cliff; but the young girl had disappeared. He sought for the traces of her footsteps, and picked some pieces of moss, which he carried to his lips. He, too, looked over the plane of ocean spread out before him; "What did she see there?" murmured he to himself. "Her God, who never will be mine!"

When he returned to the parsonage, the Abbé Rénaud and Marianne were surprised at the harsh and abrupt tone in which he spoke.

"Artists are capricious," observed the curé, timidly, to his old servant.

"O, what do I care for his caprices?" said Marianne; then, raising her voice, "Young man," cried she, "M. Lecomte, do not forget to put out your candle,—after you have said your prayers, I mean."

"Mlle. Marianne," answered Raoul coldly, from the top of the staircase, "you shall be obeyed, as regards the candle."

When the Count de Chalys awoke the next morning, the sun was shining through the vines at the window on the walls of his little room. A sensation of cheerfulness and courage seemed to fill his heart. He rose, opened his window, and saw the Abbé Rénaud reading his breviary under the shade of a fig-tree. He soon joined him, and they went together to the church, where some workmen, whom the curé had sent for, erected a scaffolding, under the directions of

the Count. In the course of the morning he began his work, and his first outlines showed a master hand, which delighted the curé. He was perfectly enchanted when Raoul explained to him the plan he had formed for the compositions he was about to make; the striking events related in the Gospels were to be represented on the sides of the walls; between the pillars the ceiling was to be painted with scenes taken from the parables; and just over the altar the figure of the Saviour, in an attitude of glory and triumph, was to crown the whole work.

"My dear M. Lecomte," cried the curé, "if I am permitted to live to see the execution of all this, I shall with all my soul be ready to sing, *Nunc dimittis*."

Notwithstanding his own impatience, the good old priest endeavored to dissuade Raoul from his excessive application to his painting. M. de Chalys hourly dreaded the appearance of Sibylle, and secretly felt as if the sight of his work might soften the heart of the young girl towards him. The curé, from whom he could not conceal his anxiety, without understanding it endeavored, from goodness of heart, to forward his wishes, and employed the most machiavelian stratagems to keep Mlle. de Férias away from the church and parsonage. All his diplomacy, however, could not suffice to conceal a piece of news so interesting to the whole parish, and the following Saturday Sibylle, who had been making some charitable visits in the village,

was told that a painter from Paris was working in the church, and had already executed beautiful things. Quite astonished at hearing this piece of news, and anxious to ascertain the truth of it, Sibylle left to Miss O'Neil the charge of distributing her alms, and hastened towards the church.

The Count de Chalys had just finished painting the scene of the adoration of the Holy Child by the wise men; the guiding-star shone in the darkest part of the arch, and shed through the interior of the sacred manger a glory around the head of the Virgin Mother, which fell upon the figures kneeling around her; in the dim distance of the arch was faintly descried an angel holding the star in the sky, like a golden lamp. Raoul had infused into this composition all his genius and his soul; the curé could not look at it without tears.

The Count was giving the finishing touches to the pure face of his angel, when suddenly the ladder which rested against the scaffolding was moved, and he heard the rustling of a dress, and the sound of a light foot-step ascending the ladder. His heart almost stopped beating, but he did not turn around, and affected to be absorbed in his work. Sibylle now stood behind him on the narrow platform; without looking at the painter, she was examining the work with an interest and admiration almost amounting to stupor. Her cultivated taste quickly detected the work of a master hand. Suddenly

she turned to Raoul, who was near her in his simple dress and painter's blouse spotted with paint.

"Sir," she began, in a timid tone of voice.

"Mademoiselle," said Raoul, gravely, rising and looking at her.

The blood rushed to the face of Sibylle; her lips half opened as if to speak; then she became pale as a waxen image, and her blue eyes flashed a proud and indignant glance towards the Count. Without saying a word, she descended from the platform, and immediately left the church.

On the church steps she met the Abbé Rénaud, out of breath, and wearing a radiant expression of face. "Well, my dear young lady?" said he. Sibylle's mind was filled with the most bitter resentment at the idea of this audacious attempt against her dignity and her peace of mind. There was in the tones of her voice an almost savage accent of haughty anger, as she answered the curé, designedly speaking loudly and distinctly.

"Well, my poor curé! we have been shamefully deceived. You must discharge this man instantly; he is no painter, or, rather, he is the last of painters; he is a disgrace to your church; come."

And she took the path to the parsonage, the curé following her in consternation.

The Count de Chalys, from the height of the scaffolding, had lost none of the words of Sibylle. They sent the blood to his brow and con-

fusion to his heart. The feelings which had prompted his romantic enterprise appeared to him to be judged with an odious harshness. His countenance assumed a dark and determined expression. He left the church, and, leaning negligently against the wall of the churchyard, he began to smoke, quietly gazing at the sea.

In about a quarter of an hour the sound of footsteps caused him to turn round. The curé was entering the churchyard, accompanied by Miss O'Neil. They both came gravely towards him; Raoul, with his back against the wall and his cigar between his teeth, waited for them, with his arms crossed over his chest.

"Monsieur," said the curé, "since you are the Count de Chalys, you ought to understand that you cannot properly remain here any longer."

"That does not appear to me, M. le curé, to follow as a matter of necessity," replied Raoul, with cold politeness. "I may be the Count de Chalys without, therefore, being the last of painters, as Mlle. de Férias has chosen to call me. You may, indeed, refuse me the honor of your hospitality, but I think you cannot deny my right to finish the work for which I was sent for. An artist is not usually dismissed with such a want of civility."

"It is understood, sir," said the curé, hesitating, "that you will be indemnified for any loss you may sustain."

"Pardon me, M. le curé," returned Raoul, smiling; "I am not a merece-



nary artist, I work chiefly for fame. I had a fancy for making myself famous by my work on your church, and it appears scarcely proper for you to drive me away. Am I here in the service of Mlle. de Férias? Is Mlle. de Férias the proprietor of this church? My business here is only with you, M. le curé; and there exists between us an agreement, which you cannot honorably break while I am faithful to my part of the compact. Are you dissatisfied with my work? do you doubt my ability? Let it be examined by competent judges of painting; if they condemn it, I will take my leave; if not, I will remain. I have finished, M. le curé."

"Monsieur," said the curé, "you cannot be in earnest."

"Perfectly in earnest, M. le curé."

The Abbé Rénaud was timid, but when urged too far he had a courage and dignity which none could fail to respect.

"Monsieur le comte," said he, firmly, "I am sure you will not continue this tone of bravado when you remember you are speaking to women and to an old man."

Raoul turned pale. After a pause, he said, "You are right; I ask your pardon."

And, turning towards Miss O'Neil, "Can I, mademoiselle, have the honor of speaking a few moments with Mlle. de Férias?"

"No, sir."

"Then, M. le curé," said Raoul, "I shall immediately go to the Marquis de Férias, and I promise, on my

honor, not to prolong my stay here for a single moment without his consent."

He descended the other side of the cliff, bowed gravely, in passing, to Sibylle, and entered the parsonage.

Sibylle, informed by Miss O'Neil of the result of the conversation, drove home to announce to her grandfather the unexpected visit he was shortly to receive.

### III.

#### RAOUL AT THE CASTLE OF FERIAS.

In a little more than an hour Raoul, who had not taken long to exchange his painter's costume for his ordinary dress, was introduced into the great drawing-room of the castle of Férias, where the Marquis and Marchioness, who were expecting him, received him with an appearance of extreme gravity. After exchanging the first salutations, the Count and his hosts looked at each other with deep, although concealed interest. M. and Mme. de Férias were secretly struck with the mixture of grace and intelligence indicated by the appearance of Raoul, who, at the aspect of the two old people, gentle, but sad and full of dignity, quickly decided upon the manner in which he should address them.

"Madame le Marquise," said he, in a slightly tremulous tone of voice, "if I had not already come here with feelings of the greatest deference, the sight of you would awaken them. But you probably know that I come

here only to receive your commands, and that I promise, beforehand, to obey them, merely reserving the right of explaining to you my conduct."

"M. le comte," said the Marquis de Férias, "we cannot refuse you the liberty of doing so; but no explanation can modify the nature, not of the commands, but of the request we must address to you on this subject."

"M. le Marquis, I trust it may not be so. I can understand that my arrival here should have surprised Mlle. de Férias and yourselves; but the idea of showing any want of respect, either to you or to her, could never enter my mind. You do not know me, M. le Marquis, and your prejudices against me may prevent your trusting me, but I flatter myself that the accents of truth with which I speak may reach your heart. You do know Mlle. de Férias, and you may imagine the kind of attachment she would inspire in the soul of a man able to appreciate her. Well, monsieur, I beg you to suppose, for an instant, that I am that man; that my nature, the bent of my thoughts and feelings, have prepared me to devote to her all the worship of admiration, esteem, and devotion which she deserves, to appreciate, in fact, the fulness of happiness which so noble and perfect a creature would shed over the destiny of the man to whom she might condescend to unite herself. If you deign to remember that the realization of this dream of bliss was for a short time permitted to me as a hope, and that

suddenly my dream was broken in my heart and soul, I ask if you have no pity for all I must have suffered in consequence!"

At these last words, which the young man had uttered with manly emotion, the Marquise turned away her head, and coughed slightly.

"Monsieur," answered the old Marquis, "you express yourself with feeling, and, I am sure, with sincerity; but, in my turn, I must ask you, since you have formed so just an idea of my granddaughter's character, what advantage you can hope for from this enterprise, which I will simply term a romantic one?"

"M. le Marquis," returned Raoul, with a sorrowful smile, "you must not exact from a man struggling in the agonies of a shipwreck an entire deliberation of judgment; a means appeared to offer itself for bringing me again into the society of Mlle. de Férias, and I seized it. Nevertheless, sir, my enterprise was not undertaken altogether without reflection. I had a hope, I think I may call it a reasonable and honorable one. As I understand it, it was from scruples of conscience that Mlle. de Férias repulsed my advances. Well, sir, I knew that, notwithstanding the rigorous, perhaps too rigorous, firmness of the principles of Mlle. de Férias, she has a generous heart. It was to her heart I desired to appeal; it was her generosity I hoped to touch, in showing to her, at her feet, a man who, as she knows, is not in the habit of humbling himself."

"I am obliged to you, M. le comte,

for your explanation, and I acknowledge that, to a certain point, it awakens my interest; but, you understand, this interest cannot make me forgetful of what I owe to the dignity and peace of mind of my granddaughter. I must therefore solicit from you the proof of deference to our wishes which you have been so good as to promise us."

"Be assured, sir, I will not refuse it to you, if, after reflection, you conclude that, in depriving me of all hope, you strike only myself; if you fully approve the principles to which Mlle. de Férias sacrifices me; if you think me really unworthy to enter your family, and to be intrusted with the happiness of your child. In a crisis of such solemnity for me, allow me to speak with an entire frankness, permit me to interest in my cause even your solicitude for the being you cherish so deeply, and with such reason. Let me recall to you the fact—and Mlle. de Férias will not deny it, for she is truth itself—that her heart did not repulse me. It will be the pride, even if it should prove the despair, of my life, to feel that I was once honored with her sympathy. Well, the sympathy of a heart like hers, certainly not lightly yielded,—how did I lose it? For a word, an expression, which, if not misunderstood, was at least most harshly interpreted. I respect and admire the religious principles of Mlle. de Férias, but have they not, even in your eyes, sir, something of the intolerance of early youth? Will the contact of life and of experience

take nothing from their inflexibility? May not the resolution they have inspired in your granddaughter ever become a subject of regret? Will she always think, as she does now, that she has done right in dividing, in desolating, two lives, the union of which she herself believed to bear a promise of unusual happiness,—and why? Because the man who loved her so deeply, and whose love she did not deem unworthy of some return, is a man of the age, with the opinions of the times, and perhaps not one of the worst, for if I am an unbeliever, I am not a blasphemer. My incredulity is neither aggressive nor triumphant; it is sorrowful and respectful. I revere and I envy those possessed of the truth, and I seek it for myself with all the sincerity and in all the bitterness of my soul. It is perhaps natural that Mlle. de Férias, young as she is, and not educated in the world, should believe such a position inconsistent with all virtue, honor, and good faith; but, sir, I appeal to your greater experience, and to the charity of your age. Can you suppose that an unbeliever like myself must be entirely incapable of all honorable and loyal sentiments, that nothing is sacred in his eyes, that he cannot respect and adore his parents, his wife, his children? Ah, if you do believe it, I swear to you, sir, that you are mistaken; that the highest reverence may exist in the heart of a man in which faith may be wanting."

M. de Férias exchanged a look with the Marchioness, and then an-

swered, in an animated manner, "But, M. le comte, even if I admit that the principles which my granddaughter has made the rule of her life may be considered as in some degree exaggerated, still, what can Mme. de Férias and I do under the circumstances? Of course, we cannot use our authority. What can we do, then? what do you request of us? I ask you sincerely, for Mme. de Férias and I are disposed, as far as our duty will permit us, to evince to you our sympathy."

"Well, then, sir," said Raoul, with a grateful smile, "do not send me away; that is all I ask of you. Grant me an opportunity to disarm, to soften, these scruples which you yourself consider exaggerated. Allow me, like Jacob, to serve seven years, if necessary, to obtain the hand and heart of Rachel."

"Pardon me, sir," returned the old Marquis, also smiling; "but the dignity of my granddaughter might be compromised by this experiment."

"How would that be possible, M. le marquis? Is it not evident that, even if the world should penetrate the mystery with which I surround myself, that it can compromise only myself? I may be laughed at, ridiculed, but nothing worse can happen. Do you require anything more? Must I engage my honor not to seek Mlle. de Férias, if she continue to avoid me? I will promise that, and also to remain in the neighborhood no longer than the time required for the completion of my work in the church. I must confess that I hope something

from the success of that work, and even if Mlle. de Férias should remain inflexible, still, I shall have the consolation of leaving before her eyes the fruits of my labor; and perhaps sometimes it may recall to her the memory of my love, and my name may be remembered in her prayers, even, perchance, with a tear of regret or a sigh of tenderness. Now, sir, I await your commands; if you exact it, I will go. I will leave immediately,—this very day; but it will be in despair."

The Marquis did not answer immediately. His eyes were fixed on the floor, and Raoul thought, from the expression of his face, he was summoning courage to reply in the negative. He rose, and, approaching Mme. de Férias, said to her with touching dignity, "Mme. la Marquise, do not allow me to be judged and condemned without expressing in words a little of that kindness and compassion which I can read in your eyes. Say one word only, I entreat you,—say that your mother's heart feels that I love your child as no one else in the world can ever love her."

"Alas! sir," said the Marchioness, putting her handkerchief to her eyes, "can it be that a man who evinces feeling such as yours does not believe in a God?"

The Count bowed, and, taking the hand of Mme. de Férias, he kissed it with deep respect. "If, madame, he had given, or had preserved to me, a mother like you, perhaps I might have believed in him."

The soft eyes of the Marchioness

rested for a moment on the face of her husband.

"M. le comte," said the Marquis, "you will not, I think, be surprised if Mme. de Férias and I should require a little longer time to deliberate before coming to a formal decision. We may still call upon you to keep your promise. At present we cannot sanction, but we will ignore, your presence in the neighborhood."

At these words, Raoul breathed hard, and the blood rushed to his pale face. "I thank you," said he, in a distinct tone of voice, and bowing low to the two old people, he took his leave.

The Marquis and Marchioness, left alone, looked at each other without speaking.

At last Mme. de Férias spoke. "How pleasing he is, my friend!" said she.

"Yes, doubtless," replied the Marquis, shaking his head; "but he is dangerous."

"You do not suspect his integrity?"

"No, certainly not; but I could not resist him. Perhaps, leading a different life, surrounded by new influences, he may in time become all we would wish to see him."

Sibylle now entered the room; her expressive face questioned M. de Férias.

"Well, my child," said the old man, smiling, but somewhat confused, "we have gone over to the enemy."

"What!" said Sibylle.

"Do not be uneasy. We have only delayed his banishment. The

young man merely asks for the privilege of finishing his work, and he promises to respect, scrupulously, your wishes. We could not treat like a criminal a gentleman well born, accomplished, and, above all, unhappy as he is. We will think a little more about it, my child."

Sibylle received this communication with her habitual respect for her grandfather, but she was astonished. She considered his decision the result of the weakness of age; she knew how she had already suffered from the conflict of her feelings, and, unwilling to subject herself to a renewal of such agitation, she determined to take the affair into her own hands. Therefore, under pretext of an errand of charity, she mounted her horse, followed by her old servant, and rode rapidly towards Férias.

#### IV.

##### THE EXPLANATION.

WHEN Raoul re-entered the parsonage, after his interview with the Marquis and Marchioness de Férias, he was in a peaceful, almost a happy, state of mind. He believed he had enlisted their sympathies in his favor; and, although they had only agreed to tolerate his presence, they almost as he thought, had sanctioned his hopes. And these hopes seemed to him still more precious since he had seen these delightful old people, who had been the guardians and guides of Sibylle's youth. What bliss, should he ever be permitted to become one

of a family like this ! Not finding the curé at the parsonage, he repaired to the church. The workmen had just removed the scaffolding, so as it might not interfere with the service on Sunday, the following day. Raoul, therefore, took the opportunity of examining critically what he had already executed, from different points of view. Leaning against one of the stalls of the chancel, he was absorbed in his contemplations, when he heard the church door open and then close, and looking round he saw Mlle. de Férias approaching. He bowed. "Shall I retire, mademoiselle ?" said he.

"No, I have come to speak to you."

After a moment of silence, she said : "I have come, M. le comte, to ask you to help me to regain my tranquillity and peace of mind, which your presence here disturbs. Must I appeal to your conscience or to your honor ?"

The words of Sibylle, and yet more the cold and haughty manner in which they were spoken, so cruelly overturned the hopes which Raoul had begun to conceive, that he became deadly pale as he said, "Is it possible ?"

"Remember that an honorable man should refrain from persecuting a woman who wishes to avoid him."

"Can you speak so to me ?" said the Count, folding his arms with an expression of sorrowful resignation.

"And if it is not sufficient to appeal to your honor, M. le comte, I ask you, in the name of reason and

good sense, to give up an attempt which can never succeed. Be assured, your presence here, after what has occurred, can only excite in me feelings of dislike and contempt."

The Count de Chalys pointed to the side of the altar. "Mademoiselle," said he, "could you speak to me more harshly, if you were one of those stone statues I see before me ?"

"I speak to you," she answered, quickly, "as a young girl who considers your presence here an outrage, and who has no one to whom she can look to defend her."

At these words a hollow sound came from Raoul's lips ; he went towards Sibylle, and looking her in the face, he said, "Go !"

Stupefied by the expression of repressed rage in his countenance, the young girl did not move.

"Go," repeated Raoul, loudly, "or I shall lose my reason ! What, these are your virtues, your charity, your religion, Mlle. Sibylle ! am I, then, a man without conscience or honor, soul or heart ? and why ? Only because I continue to love you insanely, tenderly, faithfully, notwithstanding your unjust and bitter contempt ! My crime, in your eyes, is, that I do not believe. Well, then, I tell you I do not accept your anathema, and I believe, if there be a God, he would not sanction it. I, who all my life long have sought the truth with the best efforts of my mind and in the anguish of my soul, — am I a miserable wretch ? Despise, if you will, the incredulity of indifference and of mockery, but respect the incredulity of

earnest seeking and of heartfelt suffering."

The young girl, struck dumb at this outburst of passion, still stood immovable. Pointing to the cross above the altar, in a calmer tone, the Count said, "Take there, Mlle. Sibylle, a lesson of justice and of charity. Believe me, when I tell you that a sceptic may be a martyr. For my part, I believe that in the eyes of God the sufferings of doubt cannot be a crime, and that to seek him, even in despair, is still to honor him. At least, Sibylle, my impiety does not harden my heart towards my fellow-creatures, it does not command me to sacrifice the happiness of others for miserable scruples; it may not have given me all your virtues, but it has given me one which is wanting in you, and that is, kindness of heart. And now you shall be obeyed, and I may add that it will cost me less regret to obey you, now that I know you better."

And Raoul turned away.

Sibylle appeared to hesitate, then advanced slowly towards him. "Raoul!" said she.

On hearing her sweet voice pronounce his name with a kind accent, the Count turned towards Sibylle with a look of amazement.

"Raoul," said she, "you too are unjust, and you misunderstand me. Can you really believe that I have sacrificed your feelings, and mine also, to these narrow scruples of which you speak? that I feared by loving you, and devoting my life to you, I

should offend God? Try to understand me better. To me, if there is one idea more insupportable than another, it is that of one of those unions which spring from the caprice of a day, and will not sustain the effect of time. The love I could have given you was infinite, and I felt it would be eternal; I desired yours should be the same. As a man of the world, you know how transitory are the attachments of people of the world. And can you not understand how the common hope of an endless future must purify and fortify the hearts of those who possess it? what constancy it would impart to their affection in this life? Well, this bond of union was wanting in you. You love me in my youth; when it is gone, will you love me still? As for my soul, you do not believe in it. One day I should be left alone in my love. I was persuaded of this, and rather than experience so horrible a misfortune, I have devoted my life to solitude, to abandonment, to regret. I have chosen to crush my heart with my own hand, rather than ever to feel it broken by yours. This is the crime of which I have been guilty, and is it unworthy of your forgiveness? does it render me unworthy of your esteem?"

Raoul did not immediately answer; his eyes were fixed in admiration on the young enthusiast, whose beauty, in the dim light of the church, was something almost supernatural.

"Poor child!" said he, as if to himself; then, raising his voice, he said, "Yes, Sibylle, I forgive you, even in

my despair, now that you speak to me kindly, that you treat me as a friend. Yes, I thank you. Can we not at least be friends, if a nearer tie be denied us? Do not fear; I shall not ask anything more."

Sibylle, with a faint smile, shook her head as if in doubt. "Ah," said she, "if I could hope even at a far distant day, to see you kneeling here."

Raoul smiled in his turn, and said, "I must not deceive you, I think so differently; but if ever this could happen, it would be here, in this beloved church, near this worthy priest, and beside you."

She looked at him attentively, and then, kneeling down, appeared for a short time absorbed in prayer.

After a few minutes Sibylle rose, and passing by Raoul, said, "We will meet again."

Then gazing a moment at the picture, she turned again, and said, "It is beautiful."

And Raoul listened to the retreating sound of her footsteps on the pavement of the church.

## V.

### SIBYLLE'S LOVE.

SIBYLLE returned to the castle with feelings of anxiety, and yet of greater happiness than she had experienced for a long time. She felt that the compromise with which the interview between Raoul and herself had terminated had not been quite consistent with her declared opinions;

but she said to herself, that sometimes an impulse of the heart counsels us more wisely than the strict rules of reason. She foresaw all the difficulties that would now surround her path, and the possible anguish that might await her in the end; but she accepted them almost with a secret joy. All the tenderness of her feelings towards Raoul had been reawakened by the sight of him, and she also understood him better and esteemed him more highly; and it appeared to her that, instead of adhering so closely to the rigid principles upon which she had hitherto acted, it had become her duty to devote herself to the attempt to elevate to a religious standard the character of the man who loved her so deeply.

She related to the Marquis and Marchioness the particulars of her campaign, which, she said, had terminated somewhat ingloriously for her. She ended by submitting to their approbation the treaty of peace she had concluded with M. de Chalys on condition that he should renounce all pretensions to her hand. M. and Mme. de Férias did not refuse to ratify the preliminaries of the agreement, but in reality they considered it, as the old Marquis afterwards expressed it, as only an expedient to save the honor of arms, believing that it would result in the union of their granddaughter with the Count. Towards him they were favorably disposed, from their conversation with him, from the account of Miss O'Neil, and, above all, from the opinion of the Abbé Rénaud, who entertained for



him a tender admiration, saying that his was not a perverse, but an anxious soul, which might be restored to the favor of Heaven, and whom it would be wrong to abandon to discouragement and despair.

On the following Monday M. de Férias, in company with his granddaughter and Miss O'Neil, who had gone with him to the village, entered the church, where Raoul was working on his scaffolding, and, after praising his design, informed M. de Chalys that if he chose sometimes to extend his afternoon walks to the vicinity of the castle, he and Mme. de Férias would be happy to welcome him there.

It may well be imagined that the Count did not wait very long to profit by this invitation, although at first he came but rarely.

The curé, meanwhile, watched with delight the progress of his labors, and when he was not working they had many a friendly conversation, seated in the churchyard or on the adjoining cliff.

The Count had also another companion. This was Jacques Féray, who had not failed speedily to discover that something unusual was going on in the church. At first he timidly approached at a distance, but having gained sufficient courage to mount the scaffolding, he stood in ecstasy at the sight of the radiant figures which were beginning to appear on the ceiling. Raoul, having heard the history of the poor man and of his singular devotion to Sibylle, encouraged him to come, which he finally did, regularly

every day, taking up his station behind the artist and watching him paint, usually in silence. However, he soon began to reply to the questions of the Count, and Sibylle was frequently the subject of their discourse.

"You love her very much, my friend," said Raoul to him one day.

"And you, too," said Jacques Féray, smiling with an expression of shrewd cunning. "Do not do her any harm!" he rejoined, with a severe air.

The growing confidence of Jacques in his new companion induced him to confide to him a secret trouble, which grieved him deeply. The wife and child of the unhappy man were buried in the churchyard of Férias. For a long time their graves had been neglected, but since Sibylle's kindness had awakened, in a measure, his intellect and feeling, it had been his greatest interest to plant flowers upon them, renewing them as soon as they began to fade. It was now intended that this part of the graveyard should be given up to the public, and the bodies removed.

The idea was dreadful to the mind of the idiot. He had not yet confided his apprehensions on this point even to Sibylle, but it escaped him in one of his confidential conversations with Raoul.

The abbé, happening to enter the church at the moment, the Count related to him the particulars, and asked him to purchase this spot of ground for him.

Then, turning to Jacques Féray, he said, "Do not grieve about these

graves ; I will arrange it. The ground shall belong to you."

He returned to his work, but feeling a touch, turned round, and saw the madman pressing to his lips a part of the painter's blouse which he wore.

The Abbé Rénaud did not fail to relate this incident at the castle, and M. and Mme. de Férias were so touched by it, that the following day Raoul received from them an invitation to dinner.

In the interior of their family life Raoul was surprised at the sweet gayety of Sibylle, whom he had hitherto only seen under the restraint of the etiquette of the world, and it added still more to his admiration for her.

Sibylle had prepared him for the custom of evening prayer, which was usual at the castle.

"You can go walk in the garden, when the hour comes," said she.

"No," said he, "I will not show such a want of respect in your grandfather's house."

He felt himself repaid by the expression of Sibylle's eyes, and he remained during the ceremony a little apart, but with every appearance of respectful attention.

From this time forward the intercourse between Raoul and the inhabitants of the castle became more familiar, and more than once he was present at the evening ceremony. The daily sight of the pure life of the curé, and the true piety of his present associates, could not but have a softening and elevating effect upon

his nature; it appealed to his imagination, softened his heart, and did not shock his intellect. Doubtless, the artificial life of the world and the habitual contact with so much that is evil do more even than the pride of reason to infuse doubts into the mind, and the association with good and sincere beings, together with the grand and beautiful aspects of nature, have the happiest influence in restoring peace and faith where it has been shaken. Still, these improved dispositions and these poetical aspirations were far from a moral conversion and a positive faith, and Sibylle's upright mind perceived this. The Abbé Rénaud encouraged her.

"We feel," said he, "rather than prove, the existence of God. Let him once believe that, and I will answer for the rest."

To Raoul, Sibylle never alluded to the subject which constantly occupied her thoughts, sometimes with deep discouragement, sometimes with ravishing hope.

One day she said to the curé, "Sometimes, father, I think if I should die he would believe."

One day, having seen in the manner and words of the Count a satisfactory sign of improvement, she said to the old priest, "Ah, what a dream of bliss, to restore to God the soul of him whom I love so deeply!"

This strange life had lasted about two months, when one evening M. de Chalys, who had dined at the castle, was walking on the grounds with Mlle. de Férias.

"Mademoiselle," said he, "am I right? It appears to me, you no longer seek to convert me."

"Why?" said she, "because I do not catechise you? You are mistaken; I am very desirous of converting you, but I am also very unwilling to displease you."

"I do not know how you could ever displease me," returned Raoul; "but, Mlle. Sibylle, would you like to know the state of my soul?"

"Yes, if it is better than formerly."

"It is better."

"Is it true?" said the young girl, quickly.

"It must be very true for me to tell it to you; for I should be cruel to myself and guilty towards you, did I try for a moment to deceive you on such a subject. Yes, you and those by whom you are surrounded make me doubtful of my doubts. It is so difficult to believe that beings like yourselves can be only material. Every day I seem to see more clearly that there must be a Source from which the soul descends and to which it returns. Yes, for some time past I seem to perceive a God. Doubtless, it is not yet as you perceive him. But tell me, Mlle. Sibylle, are you pleased?"

"Pleased!" said she, in a low and feeling voice; "no, I am not pleased, but I feel heaven in my heart."

They continued to walk some time under the trees of the avenue. Sibylle suddenly gave him her hand. "My friend," murmured she.

He took her hand and pressed it without speaking, and she left him.

After the happiest night of her life, Sibylle had next day a sorrowful awakening. The Abbé Renaud came to announce to her that M. de Chalys had received that morning a despatch which obliged him to leave immediately for Paris. He had asked the curé to give to Mlle. de Férias the despatch which called him away. It contained these three words:—

"Come quickly!"

"GANDRAX."

On reading this signature Sibylle grew pale.

## VI.

### THE LOVE OF CLOTILDE.

ON the same day and at the same hour when, under the avenue of trees at Férias, Sibylle put her hand and her heart in the hand of Raoul, a very different love-scene was being enacted in the drawing-room of one of those elegant summer residences not far from Paris, on the hills of Luciennes. The Baron de Val-Chesnay, the proprietor, had that day entertained at dinner a guest who had lately become his friend without his exactly knowing how or why it was so. It was Louis Gandrax. To effect his introduction on a footing of intimacy in the household of the Baron, Gandrax had not found it requisite to resort to any of the artifices sometimes employed in such cases, and which it would not have been easy, with his proud nature, for him to practise. The genius of Clotilde had been quite sufficient. She had obtained over her husband the ascen-

dency of a strong mind over a weak one. He had the most entire confidence in her. Indeed, he believed her almost a saint, and the best of wives, and his respect for her equalled his love. He loved her, however, so much that he might easily have become jealous. Therefore it was with satisfaction that he saw her direct the activity of her mind and thought towards scientific pursuits, under the direction of Louis Gandrax, whose reputation for moral principle was equal to the fame of his talents.

What first attracted Clotilde towards Gandrax was the fact of his great intimacy with Raoul. By degrees the influence of the powerful intellect, the manly beauty, and the great celebrity of the young scholar began to exercise over the mind of Clotilde a sort of fascination which she mistook for love; and in despair at the abrupt departure of M. de Chalys, of whom she heard nothing, she yielded to this new impulse, under pretext of a suddenly developed taste for scientific studies. Sometimes, however, the young woman assiduously and sincerely endeavored to share with a real interest the pursuits of Gandrax, which appeared, if not to redeem the fault of their attachment, at least to lend to it some dignity and elevation. Clotilde had strong passions, but not a degraded mind; but her detestable education had only served to confirm and increase her natural defects.

Louis Gandrax had always led a strictly ascetic life. Now, overtaken in his maturity by one of those in-

sensate passions beyond his power to resist, he had compromised with his pride, by the thought that his intellectual superiority had won the heart of Clotilde, and what was in reality a proof of his weakness he considered only another triumph of his will. The beauty and fascination of Clotilde had stirred the very depths of his soul; and even the worldly glory of his conquest appeared to him to add a new laurel to his brow. He therefore unreservedly abandoned himself to the raptures of a love which appeared to complete his proud personality, and even thought that his name might go down to posterity in connection with one of those intellectual attachments of which we frequently read in history. Now the young materialist trod the earth, which appeared to belong to him, with a still prouder step, and often repeated to himself his favorite axiom, "There is a God; it is the man who knows and who wills."

He did not know everything, however, and of this fact he was destined to be convinced this very evening at Luciennes, where he was dining with M. and Mme. de Val-Chesnay. Under the pretext of some scientific experiments, he had passed the day with Clotilde, who had organized a small laboratory at her villa. On his arrival she had informed him of a letter she had received from her aunt, Mme. de Beaumesnil, informing her of the arrival at Férias of the Count de Chalys, and of the singular life he was leading there; Mme. de Val-Chesnay was excessively amused at

the idea of the Count de Chalys being transformed into a hermit and a choir-boy. Gandrax endeavored to avoid the subject. During the remainder of the day Clotilde appeared absent, and at dinner she spoke more than once to the young scholar in a manner which, without making him uneasy, slightly wounded his pride. It was not the first time that a display of Clotilde's violent temper had clouded their felicity, and on such occasions Gandrax was accustomed to treat these passing caprices with the cold sarcasm habitual to him; and he had always found this method so effectual that it had served to confirm his opinion of his own superiority, and of the sort of irresistible magnetism with which he believed himself endowed. He was preparing, therefore, as usual, to assert his supremacy, waiting only until M. de Val-Chesnay, who usually went, after dinner, to smoke in the park or the stables, should leave him *tête-à-tête* with Clotilde.

But Clotilde, on her part, was preparing a surprise for him. They had passed into the drawing-room, where she reclined on a couch in a careless attitude. As the Baron was about to make his escape, she called to him suddenly, in a caressing voice: "Roland, do smoke your cigar here, I beg of you; I have scarcely seen you to-day."

M. de Val-Chesnay, little accustomed to such attentions, stopped, astonished. He murmured some words of thanks, lighted a cigar, and sat down in a remote corner of the draw-

ing-room, while Gandrax took a seat near the couch of Clotilde, casting towards her an angry glance. The young woman took no notice of this, but after gazing for a few moments through the open window at the moonlight, she again addressed her husband in the same affectionate tone and manner: "My friend, where are you? Why do you sit so far off? I love the smell of your cigar; come here!"

Roland now drew near, and seated himself on a stool by her side. She laid her white hand on the young man's head, and looking tenderly at him. "How handsome you are!" she said in a low tone.

And she leaned back on her couch, still keeping her hand on the head of Roland. After a short silence she turned suddenly to Gandrax. "Is it not a beautiful evening?" said she to him.

"Very beautiful," replied Gandrax.

"I love these early autumn evenings. Your hair is soft like silk, Roland. Gandrax, have you never noticed my husband's hair? It is like a child's."

"Quite," murmured Gandrax.

There was another pause. She began to laugh.

"Come, Roland," said she, "I am keeping you too long. I will allow you to go and see your horses and finish your cigar, but I only give you twenty minutes, not one more; remember, my friend."

The young Baron, delighted with such demonstrations of affection,

kissed his wife's hand, and left the room.

After he had gone Gandrax rose, and, trying to speak calmly, although his voice trembled with anger, "Clotilde," said he, "will you be so kind as to explain to me this scene?"

"What scene, my friend?" replied Clotilde, in a drawling tone.

"The scene of atrocious coquetry you have just been enacting."

"What! I must explain it? You really do not understand it?"

She smiled.

"O, do not assume your lordly frown; you will only lose your trouble. Well, then, I will explain to you this scene in one word, a word which for a long time has been burning on my lips; but better late than never!"

She drew herself erect on the couch, looked him in the face, and speaking with almost savage energy, "I am tired of you! Do you understand now?"

Gandrax at first did not move, then rose suddenly, and as if he had received a pistol-ball in the head, he staggered a few paces; however, he recovered himself by a strong effort of his will, walked a little away, and then returning to Clotilde, who had followed all his movements with a pitiless eye, "An insult," said he, coldly, "is not an explanation. What is the matter? What has happened? Why do you no longer love me?"

"Why?" returned she, in the same harsh and violent tone, "because I have never loved you; because no woman will ever love you; because,

with all your learning, you have neither heart, nor soul, nor mind,—nothing which can raise a woman in her own eyes, which can ennoble her weakness, hide her faults from herself; nothing which can make her love appear like a radiant dream, a poetry, an enthusiasm, a religion! No, I have never loved you; I have only loved in you the shadow of your friend, whom I adore, whom I always shall adore. And know that what I tell you now has been in my heart from the first; but I tried to deceive myself, to persuade myself that I loved you, in my despair at losing him. And you believed you had conquered me, that you were my lord and master. Poor man! do you think I am afraid of you? I have said enough. I think you understand now. At any rate, I do not care whether you understand or not; all I want is to have it finished. Go, and never let me see you again, for, in plain words, I detest you." And she leaned back on her couch.

Gandrax went away. While he was walking towards the nearest railway station he stopped from time to time, putting his hand to his forehead; he felt as if the earth were giving way beneath him. It was eleven o'clock when he reached his home. He entered his laboratory, and threw himself into a chair; then, as if inaction were insupportable to him, he rose, and began slowly to pace up and down the large room. The beating at his temples sounded in his ears like an alarm-bell. Chaos revolved in his brain. In this brutal

awakening from his dream of love, in this tremendous fall from the heights of his pride, he sought confusedly for something to sustain him, and he found nothing. His knowledge, his fame, his noble poverty, forever stripped of the charm which the love of Clotilde had lent to them, appeared to him odious. From without he found no strength, no consolation, no hope,—all a blank. He did not weep, for in his soul all the sources from which tears are born were dried up. He continued to march up and down like a spectre, until the dawn of day; when the morning light began to appear, his misery seemed more positive and more poignant, and as to beginning life again with this wound in his heart and this shame on his brow, he could not.

A presentiment of insanity crossed his mind; he abruptly took from a shelf against the wall a phial filled with a brown liquid, and, putting it to his lips, drank all the contents. Then, with a mournful gravity, he resumed his walk, his steps becoming gradually heavier. Suddenly he stopped, moved his arms convulsively, and fell on the floor. At the noise of his fall some people in the house rushed to his room; he was carried to a bed, and a physician sent for. After two hours of a delirious stupor he awoke, and summoned sufficient strength to dictate his despatch to Raoul. Raoul arrived the same evening, and drove immediately to Gandrax's house. He ascended the stairs without meeting any one. The

scholar's room was like a cell in a cloister; a small lamp shed a feeble light. An old woman was reading in a corner. Against the white-washed wall was a small iron bedstead, upon which Gandrax was lying. His dark hair was pushed back from his broad forehead, which was of an ashen paleness. A smile came to his hollow cheeks and his flaming eyes when he saw Raoul. He made an effort to put out his hand.

"Ah," said he, in his deep voice, "I am glad to see you again!"

"But what is all this? how long have you been ill?"

Gandrax made a sign to the woman who was taking care of him; she left the room. He then pointed to the empty phial near the lamp. Raoul hastily examined it; with a sorrowful look he approached the bed, and looking fixedly at Gandrax, "Clotilde?" said he.

"Yes," said Gandrax. And after a pause he added, "The first weakness of my life, and the last."

"Ah! my unhappy friend, is there no hope? Where is the doctor? what does he say?"

"I am the doctor. He says that the nervous system is destroyed, and I am lost. I am now nothing but matter which is being transformed."

"But you may be mistaken," said Raoul, in great agitation. "Let me send for some one; who shall it be?"

"For no one; it is useless. Do not trouble me; sit down."

M. de Chalys fell into a chair at the side of the bed: "Do you suffer much, my friend?"

"Yes, frightfully. I made a mistake, the dose was too strong; but I was insane."

After a moment an ironical expression passed over the contracted lips of Gandrax.

"And you," resumed he, in a hollow tone, "I hear you are an acolyte of the church."

"My friend, do not, I beg of you."

There was a long silence, during which nothing was heard but the labored breathing of the dying man and the faint ticking of a watch which hung over his pillow. The eyes of Gandrax, however, fixed upon those of Raoul, seemed to express a kind of painful anxiety.

"Do you wish anything, Louis?" said Raoul, leaning over Gandrax.

"Why do you not weep for me?"

"My friend, I am in a frightful dream. I am terrified."

"He does not weep for me," murmured Gandrax.

After another pause he raised his voice again. "What o'clock is it?"

"Near midnight."

"What day of the week?"

"Thursday."

"Give me your hand; give it to me quickly!"

Raoul rose hastily, and took his hand.

"Louis," he said, "have you nothing to confide to me, nothing which makes you anxious? Can you command your thoughts at this terrible moment? Are you sure, are you quite sure, what you are, and whither you are going?"

"Where am I going?" A frightful smile passed over the lips of Gandrax; he half raised himself in his bed, abruptly drew away the hand which Raoul was holding, and pointing to the ground with savage energy, "There!" he said.

His hand remained in the same position, his eyes rolled in their sockets, and his head fell back powerless on the pillow.

Raoul looked at him in silent contemplation, hid his face in his hands, and his tears streamed through his fingers, but Gandrax could not see them.

M. de Chalys watched alone beside the remains of his friend.

Two days afterwards the funeral ceremonies took place in the church of Saint Sulpice, with a mixture of pomp and austerity suitable to the merited reputation and the worthy poverty of the young scholar.

On entering the church, Raoul perceived in one of the side aisles a woman dressed in mourning, whose air of youth and elegance struck him; he shuddered. It was indeed Clotilde; her taste for strong emotions and dramatic situations, and probably a feeling of secret remorse, had brought her to the church. From time to time she wept behind her veil. Her tears were sincere, but she wept even more for herself than for the victim of her cruelty. She dreaded the future. She thought of the joyous days of her infancy, of the country near Férias, and of the peace she had left behind her when she quitted it. Among these memories of



the past, there was one which haunted her imagination with a singular persistence; it was that of the madman Féray, lying on the pavement of the courtyard at Férias, and raising himself to shake at her the pieces of iron with which she had adorned him, and seeming to address to her, after the manner of the tragic prophetesses in Macbeth, a vague threat of misfortune.

Towards the middle of the day, the Count de Chalys, having accomplished to the end his painful duty, returned to his hotel. He was sitting by himself, when suddenly the door opened, and an old servant said to him, "The lady whom M. le comte expects is here."

Raoul rose impatiently. "I do not expect any one!"

He had not finished speaking before Mme. de Val-Chesnay entered the room, and the servant hastily left.

Clotilde stopped motionless in front of Raoul. Her veil was down, but her pale face and brilliant eyes shone through it. Her mourning dress relieved by ornaments of jet seemed to add to her proud beauty, and to show to advantage her superb figure. Raoul looked at her with an expression of anger and uncertainty. She threw aside her veil, and raised to his her beseeching eyes.

"What do you want?" said the Count, harshly.

"Your pity, Raoul."

"I refuse it to you!"

He turned and walked away; then, coming back to where she stood,

"Do you know that he killed himself?" said he. "If you do not know, I tell it to you! If you do know, I think you very daring to present yourself here!"

"I did know it," murmured she.

She threw herself on a sofa, buried her face in the cushions, and sobbed bitterly.

Raoul walked a few minutes up and down the apartment, and then, stopping suddenly in front of her, "I beg of you, madame," said he, "to make an end of this? All this is useless and repugnant to me."

She looked up.

"But," said she, "do you know all that passed? Had you nothing to do with this misfortune, this crime, which I came here to weep over with you? Did you not once seek my love, or did I dream it? and when it had been given to you, did you not torture and humble me by leaving me for another, even before my eyes. And now you refuse me a word of pity or forgiveness. My crime has been that I loved you faithfully through that phantom of love which I had seized in my despair, because he spoke to me of you, — he loved you. At last I awakened from my dream in horror, and the cry of truth escaped from my heart, and it crushed him. Do not pity him; I envy him, for he no longer suffers."

Again she sobbed violently, with her face concealed by her hands.

"Madame," said Raoul, gravely, "I indeed reproach myself bitterly, since my inconsiderate conduct has

produced such consequences. I even ask your forgiveness, if you choose. But you must understand that the deepest abyss now separates us, and that this explanation can neither be renewed nor prolonged between us, under such circumstances. Go, I beg of you."

She rose, and said, gently, "I am going. Will you not give me your hand, Raoul?"

Raoul made a gesture of refusal, and turned away.

"Ah," said she, in the same beseeching tone, "how hard you are! I ask of you so little,—I who have given you so much. Will not my love, the only one of my life, win from you ~~one~~ word of kindness, of compassion? I will respect your wishes; but one thing I must tell you before I leave you, probably forever. Raoul," continued she, in the same tone, "I know I am not worth anything,—I have not a virtue in the world, not even a belief. Only one thing I can do, I can love. If you had known me better, you would not have despised a heart like mine, for no one on earth will ever love you as I have done. I feel that all is over, and that it would be madness to suppose your heart could ever soften towards me. But what I wish to tell you is, that I shall remain your slave, and that at any day, any hour you wish, at a word or a sign, I will leave all to follow you on my knees, where you will, all over the world. Adieu."

She seized Raoul's hand, and pressed it wildly to her lips. He

disengaged himself almost violently, and said to her in a low tone of command, "I beg you to go."

She appeared about to faint. "Tell me you pity me," murmured she, "and I will leave you."

"Yes, Clotilde, I pity you much. Go."

She fixed her dark eyes, shining through her tears, upon his face, sighed deeply, and slowly left the room.

The next day but one M. de Chaly's left Paris for Férias.

## VII.

### THE SWAN.

THE Comte de Chaly's returned to Férias in a different frame of mind from that in which he had left it. He felt like one awakened from a dream. The contact of real life and of the vices of society, the terrible death of Gandrax, which appeared so purely material, had brought back his feelings of ironical scepticism, and his interview with Clotilde had deeply agitated him. Although he had repulsed her with horror, still her expressions of passionate devotion contrasted too strongly with what seemed now the timid and measured love of Sibylle, who, for his sake, could not overcome a few overstrained scruples.

When he arrived at the parsonage, the Abbé Rénaud, to whom he had written to inform him of his coming, told him that the family at Férias would expect him to dinner. He

accordingly drove there, but the affectionate welcome he received could not conquer his depression. The sorrowful events which had transpired in Paris appeared to the Marquis and Marchioness sufficiently to account for the change in him; but Sibylle was more keen in her perceptions. Raoul's first look, when he took her hand at meeting her, had disquieted her; for, in her sensitive nature, feeling and presentiment appeared almost like divination. She continued to watch him anxiously throughout the dinner, and she observed that, instead of remaining, as he had been used to do, in the drawing-room during the hour of evening prayer, he left the room. She did not at all change her manner towards him, but they talked only on indifferent subjects through the evening. It was half past ten when he took his leave. As he stopped a few moments on the flight of steps to gaze at the beautiful view spread out before him in the light of a crescent moon, now sinking behind the hills, Raoul sighed deeply. A slight sound caused him to turn round. Sibylle was beside him. "You are sad," said she, in her sweet, grave voice.

"Could I be otherwise, after the cruel blow I have so lately received?"

"Certainly not; but is there not something more? Tell me truly."

He cast down his eyes, hesitated, and raising his head, said, "I would like to speak with you, Sibylle."

"Now?"

"Yes, now."

She seemed to hesitate, and then said, "Wait for me."

She went back into the vestibule, and reappeared with a white mantle bordered with blue thrown around her, the hood drawn over her head. She took the arm of Raoul; they crossed the court-yard in silence, and entered the park, walking on the broad avenue. Raoul at last spoke, and with a tinge of bitterness in his tone: "Mademoiselle," said he, "I have just passed through one of those fearful scenes in life which recall a man to reality and to his duty. I ask you now to be candid with me, to tell me whether I never shall succeed in obtaining the honor of your hand until I receive grace from on high, which I have not, and which I fear I never shall have. In that case it will be better that I should resign an attachment so utterly without hope, and try to find the sad courage to separate myself from your society."

Sibylle had suddenly stopped. "I felt it," said she, in a low tone.

Without appearing to hear her, he continued in a harsh voice: "Yes, the illusion is over for me. Your belief can never be mine. While I live, doubt will flow in my veins with my blood. That is the truth."

"Pardon me," said Sibylle, in an indistinct tone of voice, "but this is so unexpected, after what you said a few days ago, almost at this same hour and on this very spot, that I can scarcely understand it."

They walked on for some time in silence, and when they reached an open space unshaded by trees, Si-

Sibylle raised her eyes to the sky, and Raoul observed her deadly and almost transparent paleness.

"You are ill," said he, earnestly.

She smiled. "A little," said she; and, pointing to the heavens, "I fall from such a height." After a few minutes she said: "This is my answer, — I never can be the wife of a man who neither prays nor believes, who has no other god than materialism, and no hope but annihilation. It would be sinful in me to enter upon such a union, for I could not confer happiness, if I did not receive it. We must then part, but let it not be in anger and bitterness; let this last page in the romance of my life be a pleasant one, this last evening with you be a happy one."

He only answered by gently pressing her arm. After walking a few minutes in silence, she said, "Promise me that, after all, the memory of me will be dear to you."

"Very dear, yes."

"Yours will be sacred to me; I shall never see a summer sun, nor a moonlit night, without thinking of you, without blessing you."

"Blessing me!" said Raoul, bitterly.

"Yes, blessing you; you have caused me, doubtless, some hours of suffering, but I also owe to you the deepest joys and the highest emotions which can give delight to the heart of a woman. What happiness was mine on the night before your departure, when I thought your heart was opening to receive the grace of God! I have feared to appear a bigot

in your eyes, but you will not think of me in future, will you, in that unfavorable light?"

"Do not fear it."

During this strange dialogue they continued to advance into the depths of the wood, and Raoul understood that Sibylle was leading him towards all the different spots associated with their happiness, and at last they reached the Fairy Rock, where the noise of the water trickling into the basin below broke the silence of the night with a sad clear sound.

Sibylle cast an earnest look around her.

"It is here," said she, "I wished to take leave of you. Raoul, you will pardon this weakness of mine, will you not? I am still so much of a child. When I first saw you here, — you remember it, — it was springtime and sunlight. Now it is autumn and night."

She uttered these words with a sort of bewildered air, and stopping suddenly, she plunged her face into the mass of vines and damp moss which covered the rock, and sobbed bitterly.

Raoul stood motionless, and as if annihilated, gazing at this graceful creature weeping in the shadow, and seeming the melancholy genius of the solitary spot; then, coming close to the young girl, "Sibylle," said he, in a low tone of suppressed feeling, "ah, what a barbarous game you are playing with me and with yourself! what a crime you are committing in the name of God and of religion! Never two creatures on the earth

have loved each other as we do. You weep, and my heart is breaking; our happiness is in your hands, and you reject it. Why? Unhappy child, you scarcely know yourself."

"Raoul," said she, suddenly resuming her proud, clear tone, "I reject this happiness because it would be a falsehood; because I must be loved as I love myself, and because nothing lasts excepting what has its foundation there!" And she pointed towards heaven. "Ah!" resumed she, more gently, "I know what you suffer, and I could ask your pardon on my knees for the pain I give you. I too, suffer much, but less than you, for I hope, I expect, to be reunited to you. Yes, Raoul, I confidently expect it. I am certain of it. Adieu!"

They took each other's hands, and she walked away.

Raoul gazed after her; in a few minutes she stopped, and leaned against a tree; he heard her murmur to herself, "I cannot see."

He ran towards her. "Take my arm. Fear nothing, I will ask no more; but you cannot return home alone."

He felt she was trembling under her mantle, wet with the dampness of the night. She said nothing, but, leaning on his arm, she climbed a hill with difficulty. Then she walked with her head down, as if abandoning herself to his guidance.

In about a quarter of an hour she was roused from her stupor by Raoul suddenly stopping. She looked around

her with an astonished expression. "But," said she, "I do not recognize anything; this mist hides everything. Are you sure you are in the right path?"

"I thought so until this moment; but now I acknowledge I am a little anxious. We cannot see two steps before us."

In fact, as frequently happens in the vicinity of the sea, a sudden mist had risen and enveloped the whole landscape. It lent to the trees and bushes around them a phantom-like appearance, and seemed to enclose them, at a little distance, like an impenetrable wall.

The sensation of danger appeared to recall Sibylle to the realities of life, and to restore her wonted self-command. She questioned Raoul as to the route he had taken, hesitated, and then went back in the same direction; but she soon saw they were wandering still farther from the path. She then decided that their best plan would be to return to the Fairy Rock, trusting that from this point she would be able to guide their steps with more certainty.

They failed, however, in their attempt to find it, and completely lost themselves. Soon Sibylle began to think, from some indistinct landmarks, that they had gone beyond the woods which adjoined the park and entered the forest beyond, which extended as far as the high cliffs, two leagues from the castle.

They continued to walk with a sort of feverish energy, trusting only to chance to guide them. At almost

every step they ran against trunks of trees, or became entangled in the thickets. They climbed and descended steep declivities, and sometimes crossed deep and wet patches of swamp. Occasionally they stopped for a brief consultation. Sometimes, but rarely, words of discouragement and sorrow escaped from Sibylle.

"Oh!" she said, "what will they think at home? How I am punished for having forgotten them! How anxious they will be!"

Once she sat down as if she could go no farther, shivering with cold; but soon she bravely resumed her walk.

Raoul was in despair. He preserved a mournful silence. He supported Sibylle with convulsive energy, and with a sort of parental tenderness. Once, despite her resistance, he raised her in his arms and carried her across a torrent, in which he himself sank to the knees.

For two long hours did they thus wander through the woods in the fog and in the night, when, on leaving a deep valley, they could distinguish in front of them a high, wooded hill, which rose in the form of an amphitheatre before their eyes, and both at the same moment recognized the ground at the extremity of the forest, adjoining the rocks. Although at a long distance from the castle, still they were encouraged by thinking they could now find the high road. Sibylle, reanimated by this discovery, began to climb the hill rapidly, and almost joyfully; but when she reached the top she fainted,

and her head fell on the shoulder of Raoul. He called to her gently, "Sibylle!"

She did not answer.

While he supported her with all his remaining strength, his eyes wandered around him, as if he were distracted. All at once his countenance brightened; he could distinguish on the top of the cliff the outline of a hut inside which a light appeared to be burning, and he saw it was the one occupied by Jacques Féray.

Raoul called loudly, "Come to me, Jacques! Here is Sibylle, Mlle. Sibylle. Come quickly!"

A sound of footsteps was heard, and the figure of Jacques Féray appeared through the fog.

"Ah, my poor fellow!" exclaimed Raoul, in an agitated tone, "how glad I am I have found you! It seemed as if I should go mad. What a night! You see she is ill! Make a fire, quick!"

"I have one," said Jacques Féray, whom nothing ever surprised. "Come."

Raoul lifted Sibylle in his arms, and followed the madman to his hut. The remains of a fire were burning upon two large stones, which constituted his fireplace. Jacques Féray threw on it some thorn brooms, and the bright flames which burst out shone upon the walls of this desolate habitation with a strange cheerfulness.

Raoul deposited the unconscious form of the young girl before the fire, still continuing to support her.

"Go," said he to Jacques, "and bring some heather and some leaves."

Jacques went out and came back several times, and soon the floor of the hut was strewn with bunches of heather and of dried leaves, of which Raoul hastily made a bed, on which he placed Sibylle. In a short time she sighed, and opened her eyes. Seeing Raoul bending over her, she smiled; then, as if astonished, "Where are we?" said she.

"With your friend, Jacques Féray," answered he, with a reassuring look and tone. "Fear nothing. As soon as the fog has dispersed a little I will send word to the castle. Keep quiet, and try to sleep; I shall watch over you."

"Yes. I am very tired!" And meeting the anxious and loving eyes of Jacques Féray, "How are you, my Jacques?" said she, feebly. Then, turning towards the fire, "I am so cold, this does me good."

Her eyes closed, her head fell back heavily on her pillow of leaves, and she fell asleep. Raoul ordered Jacques Féray, by a commanding look, to keep silence. Jacques understood him to mean that he was to go outside; he went and laid himself on the turf a few steps from the hut. In a few minutes he began to sing, in his sweet, melodious voice, one of those chants he used to sing in his watches on board ship, when he was a sailor, and which he afterwards used to repeat beside the cradle of his little girl. Raoul, seated on the hearthstone, and leaning over the sleeping Sibylle, listened with emotion to this

monotonous song, the sound of which, at such an hour and in such a spot, was touchingly sad. From time to time he cast an anxious glance towards the cliff through the half-opened door, and he was relieved when he observed the fog was becoming less dense. By the light of the fire he wrote on a sheet of paper, taken from his pocket-book, a few lines to M. de Férias, informing him of the events of the night, and speaking cautiously of the condition of Sibylle. Then he went out and gave the note to Jacques Féray, charging him to carry it to the castle as quickly as he possibly could. Jacques immediately set out, with the rapid and uncertain pace habitual to him.

Raoul re-entered the hut; he shivered in his damp clothes. He seated himself on the stool which comprised the whole of the furniture of Jacques Féray. Sibylle continued in a deep sleep. Her lovely face, occasionally lighted by the darting flames of the fire, and surrounded by the white folds of her mantle, wore a peaceful expression; but it bore fearful traces of the emotions and hardships of the dreadful night she had passed. The eyes of the young girl were marked beneath by bluish circles, her marble paleness was now and then changed to a deep flush, and her labored breathing seemed to raise her chest, over which her hands were crossed.

Raoul remained for hours immovable, without taking his eyes off this lovely face and form, whose pure and crushed beauty brought to his mind the image of the youthful Christian

martys. The most painful fears filled his thoughts.

What passed within him during this sorrowful contemplation he himself could scarcely describe. A sudden light sometimes visits the soul of man, which language cannot convey. Suddenly he started, his eyes filled with tears, he fell on his knees, his head raised towards heaven, and it was evident he was praying. After a few moments of abstraction, a slight sound caused him to turn. Sibylle had raised herself on her bed of leaves, and was looking towards him with sparkling eyes. "Raoul," stammered she, joining her hands as if uncertain, "you are praying?"

"Yes, Sibylle, I am praying! I believe! I believe that either there is nothing true in this world, or else that you are an immortal angel!"

A flood of tears accompanied this cry from his heart. Sibylle had fallen back upon her couch, as if overwhelmed by a superhuman joy; a smile of ecstasy played around her mouth, and her beaming eyes were fixed upon those of Raoul, whose tears continued to flow silently. The young girl, too deeply moved to be able to speak, looked at him with inexpressible tenderness; she carried to her lips her hand, bathed with these sacred tears, and kissed it.

The gray dawn of morning now began to enter the hut, and soon a sound of hasty footsteps was heard upon the cliff; and almost immediately afterwards the Marquis and Marchioness of Férias appeared on the threshold; Miss O'Neil was with

them. While the Marchioness and the governess tenderly caressed Sibylle, anxiously questioning her, M. de Férias had exchanged a few hasty words with Raoul.

"My poor child!" he then said, "My poor, dear child!"—embracing her in an agitated manner.

"Can you walk to the carriage, do you think, or shall we carry you? Monsieur le comte, will you help me?"

Sibylle rose with an effort, but said, "O yes, I feel as if I could walk to the end of the world."

Casting a glance at Raoul, and leaning on the arm of her grandfather, she left the hut.

The sun was breaking through the clouds, and shedding a glory over the whole landscape. Sibylle stopped as if dazzled, then, looking back at Raoul, who was following her, she pointed to the radiant heavens. In a few minutes she turned again, and said, "You are coming with us in the carriage, are you not?"

Her voice was so strong and tranquil, her face so smiling, and her step so light, that Raoul felt a sudden sense of relief from the excessive alarm which had tortured him for so many hours.

"No," said he, "I should inconvenience you, and beside, the walk will do me good, for I am chilled. But I will come soon; and do not doubt me any longer."

She put out her hand, and he disappeared.

Raoul walked rapidly towards the parsonage, but when, in about half



an hour, he reached it, he was surprised to see the carriage standing before the garden gate. A servant told him that Mlle. de Férias had suddenly become so ill that they could not take her any farther. The Marquis came to meet him, much disturbed, and informed him that a sudden attack of fever had seized Sibylle, and that she was delirious. They consulted together a few moments, and then M. de Chalys drove off in the carriage to the town of —, which was seven leagues from Férias, to bring a physician of some reputation in the country. The Marquis had also desired him to send to Paris for another physician, and this town having no telegraphic station, Raoul was obliged to drive some miles farther to send his despatch. These different excursions, together with the difficulty of procuring fresh horses, took him the whole day, and it was six o'clock in the evening before he returned to the parsonage, exhausted in body and mind, and filled with anxiety and impatience.

As he entered the garden, he met the doctor for whom he had gone in the morning walking slowly and with an anxious face.

"Well, sir?" said he.

"Well, it is a sudden and dangerous fever, brought on by excessive emotion, and increased by the exposure to the miasma and fog of the past night."

"Is there danger?"

"Great danger."

"Ah, sir, save her!"

"Be assured, sir, I shall do all in

my power. If she recovers from this paroxysm, there may be some hope, but it has been very severe. She is beginning to be more calm. She does not scream. We shall see."

Mme. de Férias and Miss O'Neil appeared on the threshold of the house. He ran towards them. They both took his hands without speaking.

"Ah, madame, have you nothing to say to me?"

"She is a little better," murmured the Marchioness.

"Ah, what a wretch I have been!"

"No, no, do not say so! She told us all, this morning, and we do not reproach you for anything that has happened. It is a common misfortune which has overtaken us all; besides, for a few minutes past we have some hope."

The voice of M. de Férias was heard from the staircase. "Come, Louise," said he.

M. de Chalys, left alone, leaned his burning forehead on his hand, and stopped to listen; but no sound reached his ear. The shades of evening were beginning to fall over the little garden.

In the hope of calming in a measure the intolerable agitation of his mind, he went out and walked in the path which led to the gate. Then he abruptly crossed the heath to the graveyard, and entered the church. When he gazed on the unfinished pictures upon which he had spent so many happy hours, and which brought back so many tender recollections, a pang of anguish shot through his heart. He joined his

hands in convulsive grief, and throwing himself on his knees, with his head on the steps of the altar, he sobbed despairingly.

He remained there, weeping and praying, until he felt a hand touch his shoulder. He rose, and saw the Abbé Rénaud standing beside him, mute and pale. Raoul took his hand, and, looking him in the face, "Ah, my father!" cried he, "what have you come to tell me? Spare me, my father! She is not dead, is she? O, what shall I do without her? She is not dead,—do not tell me she is dead. I beg of you! I entreat you!" And he fell at the feet of the priest in an agony bordering on delirium.

The old man raised him. "My friend, be calm. Put your trust in God. Come, she is asking for you."

"She is asking for me?"

This look of anguish interrogated the curé, whose lips moved faintly; then he followed him without speaking. They crossed the heath in silence; as they ascended the narrow staircase of the parsonage, they met the physician, who pressed Raoul's hand. "Be a man, sir," said he.

They entered the little room which Raoul had occupied. It was there Sibylle had been carried. The Marquis de Férias, the Marchioness, and Miss O'Neil were standing together around the bed; their features, furrowed with the traces of tears, were now grave and calm. The first glance of Raoul met the large blue eyes of Sibylle, directed towards the door with an expression of anxiety, which seemed to be soothed when

she recognized him. He approached the bed; Sibylle's countenance, shaded by the flowing masses of her fair hair, breathed a serenity, and even a sort of joy, which at first sight deceived Raoul. She smiled on him, and feebly shook her head; then she looked towards the curé, who drew near.

"Sir," said the old man in a slow and painful but distinct tone of voice, "Mlle. de Férias desired at this solemn moment to be united to you by the nuptial benediction. She did not know, and it became my duty to inform her, that it was not proper for me to perform this ceremony; but I will do all that my conscience will permit me to do, to afford to the heart which has loved you so deeply a last consolation."

He paused, and then continued: "Mlle. de Férias, sir, has told me that you now partake her pure faith and her eternal hopes."

"Yes, sir," said Raoul, "forever!"

A ray of joy shone like a flame from the eyes of Sibylle. The old man stopped a moment. "Take her hand," said he.

Raoul gently clasped with his hand that of Sibylle.

The old priest then raised his eyes towards heaven, and in a voice broken by emotion, "My God!" said he, "God of goodness, thou knowest how they have loved, and how they have suffered! May their souls, now about to be separated, be one day reunited in eternity. And deign to bless the promise I make them in thy name. Amen." A sound of sob-

bing filled the room as the old priest finished his prayer, and he himself could not restrain his tears. Sibylle alone wept not; her brow and eyes appeared bathed in smiling light. After a moment she summoned the curé by a look; he bent over her pillow, and she spoke to him timidly, in a low tone.

"Sir," said he, turning to Raoul, "embrace her."

Raoul stooped over the couch, and touched with trembling lips the brow and hair of the young girl.

A faint blush overspread her features; she fixed on Raoul a look of infinite love and tenderness. Then, suddenly, the delicate color died away, and a mortal pallor succeeded it; the long eyelashes fell over her eyes; her lips half opened, and her unaltered beauty was fixed in a radiant immobility. Death took her gently.

There are now three white tombstones in the little graveyard by the cliff. On the whitest one, which is often strewn with wild-flowers, may be read this simple inscription: "Sibylle Anne de Férias. Nineteen years of age." And below, *In æternum!*

Since the occurrence of the last events of this history, the Comte Raoul de Chalys lives at the castle of Férias. In compliance with the wishes of Sibylle, and of the Marquis and Marchioness, who look upon him as a son, he will never leave them. He seems also to have inherited the virtues of Mlle. de Férias. The country people, grateful for his beneficence, manifest towards this young man, so grave, so sad, so pious, a reverence bordering on superstition. They scarcely know his name. They call him "the betrothed of Mademoiselle."

THE END.

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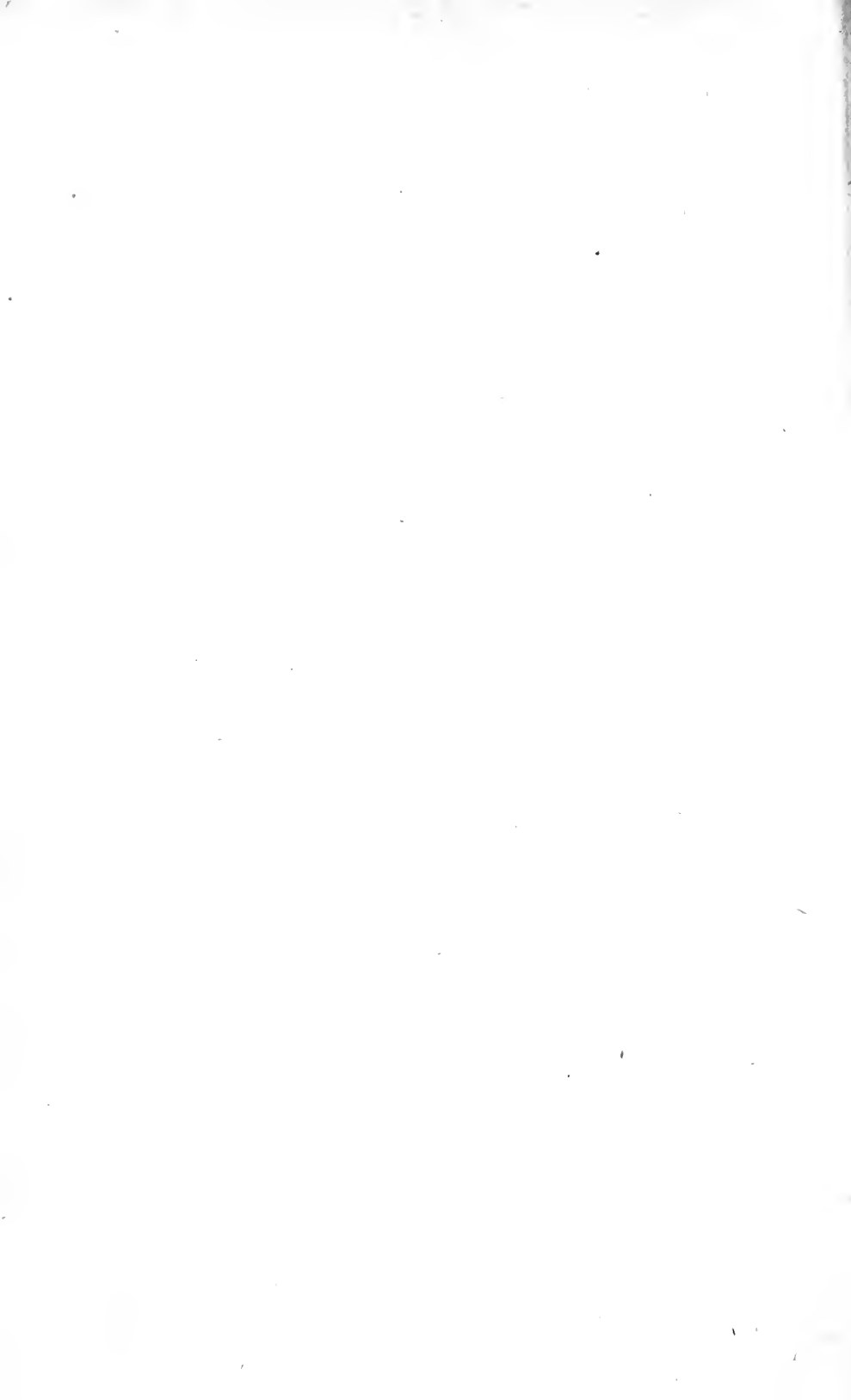
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